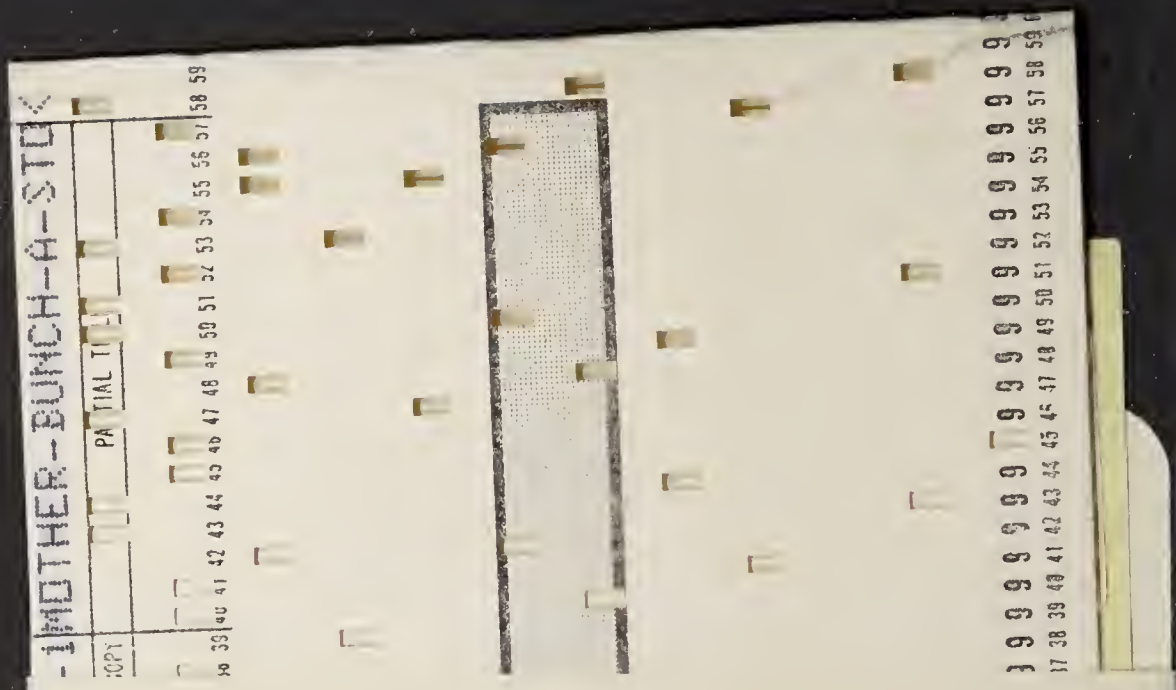
Mother Bunch

A Story for Boys & Girls

By Stella Austin



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MOTHER BUNCH.

A STORY FOR BOYS AND GIRLS.

BY

STELLA AUSTIN,

AUTHOR OF "STUMPS," "SOMEBODY," "RAGS AND TATTERS," "PAT," ETC.

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TO

GWENDOLEN AND MARJORIE,

WITH MUCH LOVE,

AND REMEMBERING THEIR LOVE,

I DEDICATE THE STORY

OF

Mother Bunch.

PREFACE.

A LONG time ago I was asked to write a story which would "bring Heaven nearer." In the character of "Mother Bunch" I have kept this aim before me, but I do not know if I have succeeded, as realisations—at least mine—fall very short of ideals. If this should meet the eye of some pleasant travelling companions of two years ago I must apologise for any shortcomings in the description of "Pat," and say that I have tried my best to do justice to his beauty and general bewitchingness. I found him charming in spite of his restlessness.

As this is the first preface I have written to any

of my stories, I take the opportunity of thanking my readers and critics for the kind treatment I have received at their hands. I have had much praise, little or no blame; thanks to the kindliness which has been so ready to encourage all that could be encouraged and to overlook the faults, of whose existence I am fully conscious. From friends one might expect as much, but from the unknown public, from which the majority of my readers are taken, I have always felt I have received much encouragement, and for this I thank them. Printed words can never be recalled, and it is a great responsibility to send even children's books out into the world. I only hope that nothing I have written has ever, or can ever, do harm or give pain to any human being. And for the rest, for all the good there may be in my books, I give thanks to GOD, by Whom the gift was given to me.

BRIGHTON, 1884.

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MOTHER BUNCH.

CHAPTER I.

Humfray begins the Story.

GRANDFATHER SYLVESTER AND HIS FAMILY.

GRANDFATHER Sylvester says that when people write a story they ought to have something to tell. I never thought that we should have anything to say that would be worth hearing; but several out-of-the-way things have happened lately, and I will write them down; for if others follow perhaps a story may grow out of them which some children may care to read. We are

very fond of reading stories about young people like ourselves; Gay prefers wonderful romances and adventures; but the remainder of us—and there is a large remainder—choose books that describe people like ourselves, their ways and their doings.

We are a puzzling family, and it takes strangers a long while to find out about us. Grandfather Sylvester says we are a collection of "odds and ends." I often quote Grandfather Sylvester, indeed we all do; first, because we are so fond of him; secondly, because he is so wise; thirdly, because he is so good and kind. For these three reasons we think so much of what he says.

We live in the village of Cool-Dillay: it is quite a village, with about thirty cottages, and only one house, which is ours. As there is only this one house there is no need to give it a name; it is just called The House; which is what people in towns call the Workhouse, Grandfather Sylvester says: they talk of going to 'The House.' If 'The

House' they mean were as comfortable as ours I am sure, poor things, they would only be too glad to go to it instead of trying with all their might to keep out of it. I wish it was. But it is not. I am afraid I am often given to *wishing*, and Ethelred is as often quoting

"If wishes were horses
Beggars might ride."

The House is a curious place to look at; it is not beautiful, but it is useful, for it holds a good number of us. Grandfather Sylvester thinks, that a very long time ago it was a small farm-house; then a wing was added to it; and the next generation built a few more rooms, and the next another wing, and so on. But as each person put on the rooms they wanted in the place that suited them best without giving a thought to the general effect, the House has more the appearance of a centipede or large spider than anything else, and there are nineteen staircases. I assure you there is not a better house for a good game of hide-

and-seek on a wet day than ours—not in the whole of England.

The head of the family,—the family of 'odds and ends,'—and the master of the house, is dear Grandfather Sylvester. His name is Sylvester Reeve. He is very tall, about six foot three, I believe, and he has snow-white hair and walks very straight even now; he is making a book upon "The Ferns of Great Britain;" both painting the pictures of them and writing the account. He is so clever, and has a great many clever friends, who sometimes come down one or two at a time from London to see him for a day or so. We generally kept out of their way, we were afraid of clever people until Grandfather Sylvester said it was a mistake, and that really clever people are much more like children and much fonder of 'good nonsense' than other people. And since we have got over our fear and mixed with them we have found that he was true in that, as he always is true in everything he says.

Next to Grandfather Sylvester comes his daughter, Mrs. Clare, who is our mother. Our father died when we were quite small, and we came to live with Grandfather Sylvester. There are three of us: first myself, Humfray Clare; I was fourteen my last birthday; then Phyllis, who is a year younger; and then Galahad, or Gay, as he is always called, who is nearly twelve. Mother had him christened Galahad, because she is so fond of Sir Galahad in "The Idylls of the King." Gay is to try to grow up like his namesake, for mother says that though this is the nineteenth century and things and people have altered from what once they were, yet we should try for the spirit and the virtue of the olden times; try to be as good, and faithful, as brave and true as the saints and good knights were in the days of yore. Mother's last Christmas present to Gay was an illumination, beautifully painted and framed; it had these words,

> "My strength is as the strength of ten,
> Because my heart is pure."

Gay liked it immensely. He is such an odd little chap. He had it hung up opposite to his bed, and you can hear him plunging about in his bath and chanting these lines the while ; or brushing at his hair, still repeating them : indeed whatever he is about in his bedroom he seems to do chanting these two lines all the time. I suppose he forgets how loud he says them ; or that we can hear. But he is touchy upon the subject, so we do not tease him ; only we cannot help being amused, he goes at them with such a will.

Now we come to Cousin Constance, Mrs. Forbes. She is niece to Grandfather Sylvester and cousin to us. Her husband is not dead, but only away in India, but he will not come home for some years, and meanwhile she lives at the House. She has four children. First, Ethelred, who is nearly a year older than I ; then Sylvia, who is the age of Phyllis ; then Bill and Nancy, the twins, who are nearly ten. They are the most harum-scarum couple, keeping us in perpetual hot water, for we

never know what they will do next. They are tall and thin, and *very* fair—almost white,—and Ethelred calls them a pair of canaries,—which we all think a very good name. They have pink skins, and a small quantity of pale flossy hair, which Bill brushes up on his head into a sort of tuft, exactly like a crested canary.

Then there is Isabel Congreive, who is no relation, but only a ward of Grandfather Sylvester's. Her husband is dead, and she has two little children, Vera, who is seven, and Gordon, who is a couple of years younger. Vera we have always called "Mother Bunch," because when she was a baby she was so fat and grave, she was a regular "bunch" or bundle. She has grown thinner now, but she is still as grave, and the name seems to cling to her. She is the pet and darling of the House, and has such odd ways, so unlike other children, that Isabel gets dreadfully worried about her. She declared once that we all spoilt her, and she began to think whether it was good for the

child to be at the House, and she said, "Perhaps she had better take a little cottage in the village, and try and train Mother Bunch to be more like the rest of the world." But my mother pointed out to Isabel that Vera had always been and always would be the same; that our petting had had nothing to do with it.

"You cannot spoil Vera," mother said, "and you had much better let the child alone. She is as good as she can be, and what do you want more?"

"That is just it," Isabel said, "she is *too* good. I can't help wishing she was not *quite* so good."

"Nonsense," mother said, "that is a very old-fashioned idea about children being too good to live. You ought to be thankful every day of your life for such a child as Vera."

And Isabel said no more about leaving the House, for she has a great respect for mother's opinion, as she is so much older than herself. Isabel and I are great friends; the others like dawdling about near home, and we are the only

two who care for really long walks, so we go off together for a ramble when we have time. I know the cottage Isabel had in her mind. It is in the lane at the bottom of the hill leading to Fairies' Hollow. Old Sykes, a retired gardener, lived there, and died about a fortnight ago. He was a great friend of Mother Bunch's and was devoted to her ; always waiting for her to pass his cottage, which she did nearly every day, that he might give her a tiny nosegay of flowers. Sometimes in winter it would be only a few bright-coloured leaves and berries, but they were tied up in such a tasteful manner that Isabel, and Phyllis, and Sylvia, and even Cousin Constance have tried, but have never managed to get the same effect.

This is the end of Grandfather Sylvester's family; those at least who live with him at the House. It will be seen that we are the only ones—I mean, Phyllis, Gay, and myself,—who are *really* Grandfather's children. But the others never call or think of him as anything else, and indeed I believe

that we all of us forget it, unless strangers remind us, and I am sure Grandfather Sylvester himself does, and looks upon every one of us separately and the whole of us together as being his family; and he, as the head of us, is both our dear Grandfather Sylvester and our very kind friend.

CHAPTER II.

Humfray continues the Story.

THE LADY'S WALK.

THE girls have lessons at home; mother, Cousin Constance, and Isabel divide the teaching between them, and masters come for accomplishments,—singing, music, and drawing; there is also a drill-master. We boys go by train to a large school in Millerstown, get back about two, and do our preparation for the next day in the afternoon.

We have breakfast and dinner alone, and a supper-tea at seven,—the hour in the day to which we look forward, with Grandfather Sylvester,

mother, Cousin Constance, and Isabel. The worst punishment that can be given, and it is only put in force for some great wrong-doing, is to eat our evening meal alone in the schoolroom, away from the fun that is going on in the dining-room or hall, for in summer we have tea in the hall, which is large and square, paved with red tiles, and with a deep, old-fashioned grate, where burns a fire in the winter, and which in summer we keep filled with boughs and ferns.

We had a surprise one morning, for as we were sitting at breakfast Ted walked in. Ted is Isabel's brother, her only relation living, he is seven years younger than she is, and is a barrister, or upon the road to be one; he lives at the Temple, and runs down to see us now and then when he has a day to spare, but he never pays us a long visit, only a few days at the outside.

"When did you come?" we all shouted, "Isabel never told us."

"Isabel did not know until this morning," an-

swered Ted. "I came late last night, and I go to-morrow evening. I have been begging for a holiday for you, but everybody seems agreed that you have had too many already, and they said, 'No.' I want some tea, if you please, Phyllis. I am going to have breakfast with you school-room party, instead of with the elders."

"We *have* had a great many holidays," Phyllis said, as she handed Ted his tea; "there are such a number of birthdays, and that means a whole day—"

"Oh, not *too* many, not nearly enough," cried Bill and Nancy together.

"There spoke the Pickles," said Ted, who is always interested in the twins. "And that reminds me to ask what scrapes you have been indulging in since I was here last."

"None," said Nancy, and Bill added in a mournful voice, "We have been too hard worked, at least *I* have,—summer exams, and that sort of thing."

"What a comfort for the family," said Ted, but Ethelred stopped him.

"You forget the upsetting of the punt?" he said.

"Of course, having been expressly told not to go into it," said Ted, shrugging his shoulders. "I thought I should hear of something. I suppose you were damp when you were rescued from the water? Who pulled you out?"

"Roberts," said Bill, "we *were* wet; we had to go to bed, though it was only four o'clock in the afternoon."

"Then there was Cook's bonnet," said Sylvia, but as she mentioned this we all burst out laughing, and though several spoke, nothing was heard until we had had our laugh fairly out, when Bill remarked,

"That was Pat; that isn't fair, it wasn't Nancy or me."

"Oh!" we all shouted, for this we could not bear, and Ted looked across at Ethelred and nodded.

"I should like to hear the story,—you tell it, Ethelred."

Ethelred cleared his throat and began,—

"Since you were here, Colonel Gordon has sent Bill and Nancy a present, a beautiful red Irish setter called Pat,—no, you are not to interrupt me,—I said he was beautiful—"

"Order," called out Ted, and Bill and Nancy, who were longing to speak, fidgeted upon their chairs, but did not disobey.

"Pat is quite a young dog, and quite untrained, as wild as Bill and Nancy themselves, and Grandfather Sylvester especially ordered that he was not to come into the house. But one day Bill and Nancy forgot, and rushed in with Pat at their heels in a state of great delight. When they remembered, they tried to catch him, but by this time he was far too wide awake to allow himself to be caught. Humfray and I happened to be at home, and we joined in the chase. It was one of the best games of hide-and-seek we ever had,

for as soon as Pat's tail whisked round one corner, we saw his red head and bright eyes peeping at us from another, and he was always appearing in the most unexpected places, and before we could lay hands on him, was careering off at full speed. At last we lost him for a few minutes,—we were then in the attics,—and Bill and Nancy declared he must have got on the leads, and were working themselves into a state at the idea of his committing suicide by jumping over the parapet, when we heard a bustle in one of the bedrooms; we had looked in before, and thought it was empty, but we looked in again. It was Cook's afternoon out, she had been to visit a friend in the village, and when she came in had taken off her bonnet and shawl and put them upon the bed. It was her Sunday-go-to-meeting bonnet, and was adorned with a large orange feather. Pat had amused himself by unpicking the bonnet, which was scattered in pieces over the floor, and the feather he had licked and licked until it was as straight as a bit

of stick. Bill and Nancy's first thought was whether the yellow stuff off the feather would poison Pat, but he sat upright, wagging his feathery tail, as pleased as Punch. Cook cried over her bonnet,—poor old Cook, she *was* vexed."

"We had to save up our pocket-money to buy her another," said Bill.

They had not at all liked doing this, and they always spoke in an injured tone about it.

"But it did not make up for the old one," I said. "You know Cook told us she could not replace that orange feather for love or money. There was not another left."

"She has a red, which is prettier," said Nancy; "it cost a good deal," with a deep sigh.

"It *did*," said Bill. "I had no idea bonnets were so expensive. Don't you ever take to them, Nancy."

"I won't," said Nancy.

"The colour of the feather was a matter of opinion," said Ethelred. "Cook, who had to wear

the bonnet, preferred the orange. You do not think of that."

"It seems to me that you Pickles make a point of forgetting. Turn over a new leaf and make a point of remembering. It is quite as easy; only *try*."

"Grandfather Sylvester says they grow worse instead of better," says Sylvia, "and that they remind him of an old housekeeper who always brought her accounts week by week to her master, and at the end there was the word 'Fagots.' At first it was not much, but it grew to a larger sum each time, until at last her master asked her how it was that they could possibly burn so much wood. Then she explained that the word was not 'Fagots' but '*Forgets*,' and that whenever she could not remember how she had spent the money, she put it down under '*Forgets*.'"

"It would save me a world of trouble if I could lump my weekly accounts under the head of 'Forgets,'" said Ted. "Some more tea if you please,

Phyllis. Well, Gordon, why are you gazing so reflectively at that empty egg-shell ?"

"Poor *Hegg*," said Gordon, thoughtfully.

We could not help laughing.

"Wise Gordon, to eat the egg first and then say 'Poor Hegg' after it was eaten," said Ethelred, and Ted added,

"I had no idea you were such a little cockney, Gordon."

"It is our fault," said Phyllis. "Isabel gets quite vexed with us, and we really ought not to do it. We must turn over a new leaf, but I am afraid we have encouraged Gordon to aspirate his H's in the wrong place and to talk bad grammar. He doesn't know any better himself, and thinks it is all right."

"It *is* right, Gordon," said Bill. "Be sure you say 'am and heggs ; it sounds very pretty."

"For shame, Bill," said Sylvia, "you know we promised Isabel we would not do it any more. It is *egg*, dear Gordon, not *hegg*."

"*Hegg*," said poor Gordon, struggling hard and being more emphatic than ever.

"No," said Phyllis, "try again, *egg*, Gordon, *egg*."

"Egg, Gordon, *Hegg*," repeated he.

"The first was right," said Sylvia, "we will try again another time."

There was a knock. We said "Come in," and Frederick, our new indoor man, entered. He is so very shy and awkward; blushes every time any one looks at him and speaks to him; does not know what to do with his legs and arms, and is in and out of the room like a Jack-in-the-box. He was a lad in the village, and Grandfather Sylvester took him out of kindness, because he is an orphan, a great friend of Mother Bunch's, who begged hard and coaxed Grandfather Sylvester to try him. But he will want a great deal of training before he is worth anything, Grandfather Sylvester says. He has fair hair, china blue eyes, and a pink and white complexion. Bill and Nancy think he would look

so nice in a bonnet, and are longing to get him to try on one. He is not ugly until he laughs, and then his face creases all over as if he were quite an old man. It was creased when he gave his message with a chuckle of delight before it.

"Please, Miss Vera, and when breakfast is done will you go to Mr. Reeve in his study, and he will show you which piece of garden you are to have in the Lady's Walk."

Frederick disappeared, directly he had said this, so quickly that the news took our breath away. None of us had ever had the honour of a piece of ground in the Lady's Walk. We had to be content with the plots down by the shrubbery, and Roberts even grumbled at our having those. "Such a waste of good land," he called it. Indeed we were wondering what Mother Bunch would do. Not another inch of ground would Roberts give us, and we each had our separate piece when we were seven years old to do with entirely as we pleased. Grandfather Sylvester often walked down

to see them and laugh over them. He said he could read something of our characters in the way we managed our gardens. This year, for instance, Bill and Nancy had pulled up their flowers and planted nothing but radishes, because they were so fond of them. They were always bringing in plates of radishes for breakfast, so long as they lasted, of course forgetting to wash them, and expecting us to eat them with the mould upon them. Mother Bunch was seven years old a week ago, and we were wondering where her garden would be when Frederick's message gave us a surprise.

"I never thought Grandfather Sylvester would give anybody a garden in the Lady's Walk," said Phyllis.

"What is the story about it?" asked Ted.

"Have you *never* heard it?" we all said, and Ethelred added,

"You *must* have heard it and forgotten it."

"Yes, I am sure you have," said Sylvia, quite reproachfully. "Fancy knowing Grandfather Syl-

vester all these years and never having heard the famous story."

"Famous to *us*," I said.

"I am very sorry," said Ted, "but I can't tell an untruth and say I know it when I do not. Who will tell it?"

"Gay," we all said.

And Sylvia said, "Gay loves to tell it."

He does; and having told it so often and having it by heart, he started off with the speed of an express train.

"The story took place a long time ago in the days when there was more fighting than there is in these days, and no penny posts, and no railway, so that when people went to the wars they were often not heard of for months at a stretch. And there lived in this house then an old lady,—a great-great-great-grandmother of our Grandfather Sylvester, and she had only one son: but there was a young lady who lived with her to read to her and write her letters for her, for she was blind. The

name of the son was Humfray, and the young lady was Phyllis, and those two names are kept up in the family to this day. Humfray and Phyllis were engaged to be married when there came a summons for him to join his regiment, which was ordered abroad for active service. He thought he might be away for some time, and he left his faithful dog Luarth, a beautiful bloodhound, in Phyllis's charge. The morning Humfray went off Phyllis and Luarth walked with him as far as that little green hill with the seven firs growing upon it, called the Seven Sisters. Here Humfray put upon Phyllis's finger a gold ring with a large sapphire in the centre, surrounded with small diamonds. And he told her to read the inscription inside the ring when he was gone; never to forget him, and every day to pray for his safe return. Then he mounted his horse and rode slowly away, turning at the bend of the road to wave his hand to her for the last 'good-bye.' The motto written inside the ring was, as Phyllis found when she looked, 'Le jour viendra,' or 'The day will come.'

For some while they heard news of Humfray as regularly as he could manage to send it; but then for a long, long time they heard nothing. At first this did not make them anxious, for they hoped he might be on his way home; but weeks and months passed, and still no tidings came. Every day, whatever the weather, Phyllis and Luarth always walked to the Seven Sisters, and Luarth would prick up his ears as they stood for a few minutes watching, and whine and look up in Phyllis's face as much as to say, 'Is not my master coming?' And Phyllis's favourite walk in the garden was that raised terrace underneath the wall of the kitchen garden; for from it she could see the Seven Sisters; and she paced up and down it so often, with Luarth by her side, that that was the reason it had the name it has kept ever since—the title of 'The Lady's Walk.'

"Then Humfray's mother died, and Phyllis and Luarth were left alone in the House with only the servants. There had been constant inquiries made about Humfray and various reports; some said he

had been wounded and taken prisoner; others that he had married and was ashamed to come home. But when Phyllis heard this last report she only smiled and kissed the ring he had given her with the motto inside it, 'The day will come.' And when some one said, 'But he may be dead,' she said, 'Yes, but then the day will come in Heaven.' She knew he could not be untrue to her.

"Then poor Luarth who was growing very aged had rheumatism in his limbs; but he managed always to go with Phyllis when she went upon her daily walk to the Seven Sisters: until one morning when he dragged himself there with a great effort and then, instead of sitting 'at attention' with his ears pricked back, he just stretched himself at her feet and died. Phyllis had him buried upon the hill with a stone over his grave and

'LUARTH,
A Faithful Friend,'

carved upon it."

"We always keep the nettles and grass away

from the stone," said Phyllis, "and you can read the words quite plainly still."

"Poor animal," said Ted. "Go on, Gay, I am anxious to hear the end."

"Nine years passed, when, one evening as Phyllis was walking up and down the terrace walk the little wicket-gate at the end of it opened, and a tall man who stooped very much came towards her. He had lost one of his arms; his face was cut and scarred, and his hair was white; but it was only for an instant Phyllis thought him an old man and a stranger; she recognised Humfray, altered though he was, and with a glad cry she ran to meet him. He told her his adventures afterwards, how he had been taken prisoner, was wounded and ill for a long time. When he grew better he had to work very hard, and was so closely guarded that it was years before he managed to escape. They were married soon afterwards, and lived at the House very happily, until they died."

"It is a very pretty story even if it is not true," said Ted.

We were very much shocked, for we had never ourselves doubted the entire truth of the story, and we knew that Grandfather Sylvester firmly believed in it, quite as firmly as we did; so we set upon Ted, the whole of us except Vera and Gordon, and demanded "why he doubted it."

We had a noisy discussion, and then Ted said abruptly,

"What became of the ring? It ought to be handed down as an heirloom in the family. A ring with such a story would be worth having."

There was silence. No one spoke until I said,

"That is the odd part. The ring has never been found. Grandfather Sylvester cannot think what has become of it."

"Ah," said Ted.

"He thinks," said Ethelred, "that perhaps it was buried with Phyllis, those two figures in the church

carved in stone with their two children kneeling at their feet are Humfray and Phyllis."

"And if they are buried and their likenesses are in the church it *must* be true," said Gay.

"Oh, I did not disbelieve in the people themselves, only in the story," said Ted.

"*I* mean to believe it, in spite of all you say," said Sylvia.

"So do I," we all said, one after the other, and Ted laughed.

"It was a very good story at any rate," he said, "and in return for it I will give you a piece of news. Next Thursday Pippo Stevens is coming to stay here for a few days. Look at Bill and Nancy, how wide-awake they are at the mere mention of news. He is an artist."

"One of Grandfather Sylvester's *very* clever friends," said Nancy, in a disappointed voice.

"He is an uncommonly good sort of fellow," said Ted, "but very shy and sensitive. He has fingers that can paint pictures, and a brain that can invent

them; but, alas! no money. His mother was Italian, his father English. Wait for him anxiously, Mother Bunch and Gordon, and you will see the newest fashion. Brown velvet coat, yellow silk stockings, yellow tie, brown velvet knee-breeches tied in with yellow ribbon; and a sunflower as large as your head for a button-hole."

"How nice he will look," said Vera.

"We will go into my nursery and watch for him from dee window," said Gordon, drumming upon the table with delight.

Phyllis exclaimed that she had no idea it was so late. Nor had we, we had been so busy talking, that the time had slipped away, and we boys had to run for it, or we should have missed the train, and we left Ted having a game of play with Gordon, and Vera trotting off to Grandfather Sylvester's study.

Grandfather Sylvester says that Vera is such a mixture,—in some things so very childish, in others so wise. He says she reminds him more than any

one he ever came across of that verse in the Bible about being "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." She is so very grave, and hardly ever laughs, but looks at you with her large serious eyes as if she were thinking a great deal about you. Though she is the youngest in the house, except Gordon, everybody seems to tell her things.

We have had a great worry with our housemaids, they no sooner come than they get engaged and leave us to be married; I believe we have had five fresh ones in eighteen months, and it was to Mother Bunch they each of them first told the news of their engagement. When Roger, the boy who does odds and ends, gets into trouble, he goes to her to be comforted. She sits quite still, and thinks for a great while, and then sometimes she says something very wise and quaint, or if she cannot think of anything to say, she just puts her two arms round your neck and loves you, which does equally well, if not better.

Cool-Dillay is so small, that we know all about the people as if they were our own relations, and they know all about us. Vera is present at everything that goes on ; she has been bridesmaid seven or eight times, and she went to the funeral of little Billy Parker. Isabel was quite vexed at Mother Bunch wanting to go to a funeral, she said she did not like children to hear or see any sad things, they ought to be always bright and happy. But Grandfather Sylvester said it would not make Vera unhappy to go, that she is never unhappy, though she is so grave. And indeed Grandfather Sylvester was quite right, for we all have our ups and downs, and feel miserable now and then, but Vera is always the same ; and I am sure she looked quite as serious when she was starting for a wedding as for the funeral. And the girls said that she was equally grave when strewing flowers before the bride, or emptying her white roses upon Billy Parker's coffin. When Mother Bunch saw that Isabel was vexed that she wanted to go to the

funeral, she climbed into her lap, put her arms round her neck, and said,

"Mamsey, when poor Billy was alive he cried because he was ill, but now GOD has wiped away his tears, and he is not crying any more."

Isabel teaches her a text every morning; she is very slow in learning it, but never forgets it when she has once learnt it. Her text that morning had been, "And GOD shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

When Isabel saw the way in which Vera looked at it, she put her down from her lap and said, though I saw there were tears in her eyes as she spoke,

"Very well, Vera darling, I give you permission to go to little Billy Parker's funeral, but you must come home directly afterwards, as the sun is hot now at three in the afternoon. We shall some of us be there too. Now run away and gather your white roses."

We were all talking about Mother Bunch the

other day, and we came to the conclusion that the reason she is so unlike other children and other people altogether, is that she has so much *faith.* It looks funny written down on paper, for I suppose we all ought to have faith, but Vera not only believes everything she is told, but she acts upon it.

I will give an instance,—Mother was giving the younger children a religious lesson, and she said that when we say our prayers, GOD is listening to us just as if the one who was praying was the only person in the whole world, and that He always answers prayer. Vera listened most attentively, and now whenever she wants anything, she goes straight away and prays for it, and is quite satisfied that she will be sure to get it. Vera *never* doubts.

Then she is very fond of saying her prayers,—I do not mean morning and evening, and a prayer in the middle of the day to remember that our LORD died for us, which we all say, but prayers

at odd times. She never passes the church, which stands open all day, without going into it to say a prayer. I heard Bill and Nancy, who are not fond of going to church, ask her once,

"Why do you say so many prayers, Mother Bunch?"

And she just looked at them quite straight and grave, and said,

"Because GOD is listening, and I do not like keeping Him waiting."

It is the kind of reply she always gives,—something that you do not understand, and cannot answer again.

There is another thing. As Vera believes everything she is told, we have to be very careful what we say. Grandfather Sylvester says it is very good for us to have this guard upon our tongues, because it helps us to keep from exaggerations and from telling crams. He says that crams are just white lies and nothing less. Some of the

boys we know think Grandfather Sylvester both strict and "faddy," as they call it. But we love him dearly, and we feel that if he is particular, it is only because he wants us to grow up good and true.

CHAPTER III.

The Story tells itself.

MR. PIPPO ARRIVES.

PIPPO Stevens came, and there was no one to receive him but Vera and Gordon. He had written to say by what train he was coming, and Mr. Reeve had intended to go to the station to meet him, taking also Ethelred and Humfray. But when the day arrived, Pippo Stevens found he could get away earlier than he had thought, and as he had not been out of London even for a day for the last two years, he had such a longing for a breath of fresh air, that he put his things into his portmanteau, ran down to the station, took the first

train he could catch, and made his appearance at Cool-Dillay at half-past four instead of seven. The late tea was postponed until half-past seven.

The party had dispersed their various ways, only Vera and Gordon, who were not allowed out in the heat of the summer until five, were at home. They were in the schoolroom at play when Frederick knocked at the door and came in, in a state of great excitement.

"Please, Miss Vera, the gentleman has come, and what am I to do with he? He is all alone in master's study. There is nobody at home."

"There is Gordon and there is me," said Vera, getting up and holding out her hand. "Come, Gordon, Mr. Pippo is here, and we must go and see him."

"He wasn't 'pected so soon," said Gordon. "I meant to have been watching for him from my nursery window."

"It is all the better that he has come, because we shall see him sooner," said Vera.

Frederick followed at a distance to hear if there were any orders for him. Vera and Gordon entered the room together and found Mr. Pippo, as they called him, looking out of the window. He turned as their footsteps fell upon his ear, and they saw a short slender man, with a very thin dark face and large brown eyes. He was evidently shy, for he grew red even underneath his dark complexion, as he came forward to meet the two children.

"This is Gordon and I am Vera, and the others are out. Will you please sit down, Mr. Pippo?" said Vera, in her sweet slow voice.

"I am afraid I came sooner than I was expected," said Mr. Pippo, growing redder and stammering a little.

"That does not matter; we wanted you to come," said Vera, and Gordon thrust his golden head forward and said eagerly,

"We is welly glad to see you."

"Thank you," said Mr. Pippo; then they sat in

silence for a few seconds. Frederick was waiting door in hand and looking anxiously at Vera.

"What would you like to have to eat?" asked Vera. "Grandfather Sylvester says that travelling makes people hungry."

"I—I am not in the least hungry, I assure you," said Mr. Pippo. "I had a good luncheon. Pray let me wait until the usual meal, I would not for the world give trouble."

"If you isn't hungry p'raps you is thirsty," said Gordon. "I is. It's so hot. Will you have some tea with Vera and me?"

Gordon had hit upon the exact truth; Mr. Pippo was thirsty, *very* thirsty, and would be most grateful for a cup of tea. Frederick was off like a shot and the tea soon appeared, much stronger than usual, for Vera and Gordon generally had a great deal of milk and a suspicion of tea to give it a flavour. Gordon went to bed before the evening meal, which they took all together, but Vera had made it her supper since she was six and a half,

and so would Gordon when he arrived at that age.

"Do you think you can pour it out yourself, Miss Vera?" whispered Frederick. "I had it made in the little tea-pot so as it might not be too heavy for you."

"Yes, thank you, Frederick," said Vera.

"Oh let me carry it, I will be careful," pleaded Gordon, as he saw Frederick waiting to hand the tea. "There," he said triumphantly, as he put the cup and saucer down upon the table by Pippo Stevens' side, "I did carry it welly carefully. I wish there were four Mr. Pippo's that I might carry four cups of tea."

"Perhaps Mr. Pippo will have another cup when he has finished that," said Vera.

"Oh, you will, won't you?" asked Gordon anxiously.

Mr. Pippo laughed. He was feeling quite at home with these two charming children.

"Perhaps I shall have more than 'another cup,'

if you can spare it," he said ; "it *is* a hot day for travelling, and I am very thirsty."

"Oh, you can have twenty cups," said Gordon hospitably ; "as many as ever you want, and I will carry them for you welly carefully."

Vera and Gordon now had leisure to inspect their visitor ; and they were much disappointed in the result. Vera peeped under the table and only saw a pair of ordinary heather-mixture trousers ; Gordon peered all over him, and sighed. Pippo Stevens, unconscious of the disappointment he was causing, drank his tea and ate his bread-and-butter, and felt he was having a very good time. When Gordon could contain himself no longer he spoke,

"What have you done with your welwet coat?" he asked.

"And your yellow silk stockings?" asked Vera.

"And your tunflower?" continued Gordon.

"And your brown velvet knee-breeches tied with yellow ribbon?" added Vera.

Pippo Stevens was completely mystified; he glanced with astonishment from one questioner to another.

"It was Uncle Ted told us," said Vera. "We thought you would be so prettily dressed; and Gordon was going to wait at the nursery window to see you come."

"Oh," said Pippo Stevens, laughing, "I understand. I went to a fancy ball in a dress the same as you describe, and your Uncle Ted was there."

"Then Uncle Ted was not telling 'tories?" asked Gordon.

"Oh, no, I really have the dress and have worn it, more than once; but I have left it at home now."

"You would have made it dusty and 'poiled it travelling," said Gordon. "But you will bring it the next time you come?"

"If I am invited again. Yes."

"You promise, *sure?*"

"I promise, *sure*."

"And you will wear it?"

"Some evening, to please you. Yes."

"Why not in the day-time?" persisted Gordon.

But Vera interposed saying, "Mr. Pippo wants some more tea," and Gordon was only too ready to hand the cup and saucer. The carrying of it safely took off his attention from Mr. Pippo's dress, and soon after some of the walking party returned, and were surprised to find their visitor had arrived. Grandfather Sylvester had known his father slightly, but this was Pippo Stevens' first introduction to any of the family, except Ted, who was more an outsider. It was fortunate, as they were such a large party, that they came in by twos and threes, so that Pippo Stevens was not quite overwhelmed by numbers. He was shy and nervous, and gave them the impression of being rather sad and depressed.

In the midst of the talking Vera, who had been

standing watching the sun as he was moving leisurely towards the west, slipped out of the room, trotted up stairs, put on her large white cotton bonnet, picked up Sweep the kitten, and set off for a walk by herself.

CHAPTER IV.

The Story tells itself.

MOTHER BUNCH GOES TO SEE THE FAIRIES.

MOTHER Bunch was in the habit of paying visits to her friends and of going about the village alone; or, if she could get hold of one, accompanied by an animal. Pat was devoted to her, and was always upon the look-out for her; but this afternoon he was with his master and mistress, so Mother Bunch had to content herself with Sweep, who purred contentedly, and peered about him in a manner which showed he was used to the arrangement.

Mother Bunch had been hearing a great deal

about fairies lately, and last night she had asked Sylvia if they lived in the Fairies' Hollow. Sylvia, who was buried in a book, hardly heard what was said, and answered,

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Do they come out in the day-time, because I have never seen them?" was Vera's next question.

"Who?" asked Sylvia, rousing a little.

"The fairies."

"Oh, no, never in the day-time."

"*When* do they come out?"

"In the evening when the sun is going to bed, I suppose. If you will wait until I have finished this story, Mother Bunch, I will answer any questions you like to ask."

But Vera had heard all she wanted to know, and troubled Sylvia no further. When the others came in and entertained Mr. Pippo she set off for the Fairies' Hollow that she might see the Little People with her own eyes. The sun was still a

long way from his bed which the clouds were arranging for him, but Vera was one who took things quietly, and she often stayed to have a friendly chat with some of her neighbours in the village.

The Fairies' Hollow was at the extreme end of Cool-Dillay: past old Sykes's cottage was a steep ascent, bordered on each side by red rocks and large trees: then there was a sudden dip where grew larch, aspen, alder and fir trees; in the spring a carpet of wild flowers,—and through which there sang a little stream of brown water as it made its way over a bed of soft sand, and hard round, white pebbles. The flowers were withered now, but the ground was covered with moss; large ferns waved in the shade, and some branches of honeysuckle threw themselves from one tree to another. It was a very charming spot, and sometimes a picnic from the nearest town found its way there and made the grass black where they boiled their kettle, and strewed the ground with corks and ginger-

beer bottles, torn pieces of paper and fragments of food. Vera, who was very fond of the Fairies' Hollow, had a hard day's work in tidying up after one of these parties; sometimes Bill and Nancy helped her if they had "nothing better to do," and the brown stream worked hard too, and carried away all the rubbish for them: he was quite a fierce little stream in winter and spring, and rushed along in such a hurry, for then he was so full of water that he knew, unless he rushed along with it very fast to empty it into the river, that it would gain the mastery over him and overflow his banks.

Mother Bunch walked very slowly, for there was no need to hurry. The village was wide-awake at that evening hour; men coming from work; boys off to the cricket-field; women and children standing at their gates to welcome husband and father home. It was the hour of rest after a hard day's work, and people were making the most of it. Each of them had a smile and greeting from Vera as she passed through the

midst of them, Sweep tucked comfortably under her arm.

Upon the road she met a little girl, running very fast, her hat falling off the back of her head, her face red and hot, her hands holding up her pinafore in a tight grasp.

"This is Polly Beaver," said Vera, squeezing Sweep to attract his attention.

"Polly?"

But Polly instead of curtseying, smiling, and saying "good evening," only shot a very cross look at Vera over one shoulder, and panted on faster than before.

Mother Bunch was much puzzled; and stood watching until Polly had passed out of sight. A short distance further she came to a small cottage with a long strip of garden before it, the picture of neatness. A straight path divided the two borders that led to the cottage, and this path was paved with the round white pebbles about the size of a marble which lay at the bottom of the brook.

Whoever did it had a character in which patience and perseverance were both combined.

And that boy was Joe, who was at that moment seated in the middle of the paved path; dressed in his smock frock and corduroy trousers; crying as fast as the tears would come, and wiping them away with the tail of his smock.

Vera put down Sweep, who arched his back and trotted quietly home; then she undid the latch of the small gate and went up to the sobbing boy.

"What is the matter, Joe?"

No answer.

"Joe?"

"Yes," sob, "Miss," sob, sob, "Vera," sob, sob, sob.

"Something *very* bad must be the matter. Is your mother ill, Joe?"

"No," sob, "her's," sob, "out."

"Then *what* is it, Joe?"

"It's—it's *her*, Miss Vera. Her's a nasty, spite-

ful little cat, and I won't have nothing more to do with she."

"Oh, Joe, you do not mean your *mother*," said Vera in a shocked voice.

Joe's tears dried under the thought of some one to whom he could pour out his woes, and his words came hot and indignant,

"No, Miss Vera, 'tisn't mother, it's that nasty spiteful Polly Beaver. Her's a vixen, her is."

"But you and Polly are such friends," said Mother Bunch.

"Oh, yes," said Joe, derisively, "much her cares for I, or her wouldn't have behaved so spiteful; her don't care for nobody but herself," and Joe's tears began afresh at the remembrance. He had only sobbed before, now he howled, and the tears rained down his cheeks, tumbling one over the other as if they were having a race to see which could get to his chin first.

Mother Bunch was patient, and she was also sensible. She was not a strong child, and grew

easily tired; so seeing a milking-stool at the cottage door, she fetched it and sat down opposite to Joe, waiting until he had finished crying.

"Tell me about it, Joe," she said, when his howling had somewhat subsided, and he was rubbing his arm backwards and forwards across his red eyes.

"It was the hen-and-chicken," said Joe. "I did took such care on 'em, Miss Vera. They was the only ones I had, and they was give to me by Daddy Sykes. And Polly she come to help me do the garden up this afternoon, and she says as how she would like a root of the hen-and-chicken, and I said as how it wasn't the time for dividing of 'em yet, and there wasn't enough to divide, but I said as if she would wait until the autumn come, that then she should have a root. But she flew into a tantrum, and said as how she wanted 'em at once, and what should she do but grab them up all of a minute, wrap them in her pinny, and was off down the road afore you could say 'Jack Robin-

son.' I wasn't going to follow she, and I shouldn't have minded if it hadn't been they hen-and-chicken what old Daddy Sykes gave to me, and it was the last thing he gave me, it was," and Joe howled again.

Vera looked around. There were evident signs close by where the angry hands had torn up the roots of the hen-and-chicken and scattered the mould over the pebble path. It was a very hard case, no doubt. Joe had been a devoted admirer of old Sykes, and was like a grandson to him. The old man gave him cuttings of his favourite plants, and often proudly declared that he should make a first-rate gardener of Joe in time. There certainly was no garden in the village so well kept as that of Joe, and he had gained the prize at the cottagers' show for that, and also for several fine varieties of plants. He lived alone with his mother, who was a widow, and he her only child. There were other roots of daisies, double bright red, and some pure white. These, and especially

the latter, Vera thought much prettier than the disputed hen-and-chicken, which were a mixture, speckled pink and white. Perhaps Joe prized them so highly, partly because they were the only ones of the kind in the village, and partly because, as he said, they were the last thing the old man had given him.

Mother Bunch sat upon her milking-stool and thought. Joe felt her sympathy, though it was unspoken, and after a few last sniffs his tears finally dried, and he opened his swollen eyes and looked at her. She had been old Sykes's favourite too, and Joe was bound to her by their common love for the old man, whose cottage was empty, and who had gone from them to the GOD Who made him. Mother Bunch was gazing at a root of large double white daisies, but she did not speak.

"I'll never have nothing more to do with she," said Joe at length.

Still Mother Bunch said nothing.

"And if I see her coming I'll go another way, that I will."

Then Mother Bunch looked straight at Joe.

"Poor Polly," she said softly.

Joe stared in astonishment.

"A nasty, spiteful little cat," he said, "and you a-taking of her part. Oh, Miss Vera!"

Poor Joe! The whole world was against him if Vera sided with Polly, and Daddy Sykes was gone where no moaning or complaints could reach him. This last straw took from Joe even the comfort of tears. There was nothing but despair before him.

"She is a very naughty little girl," said Mother Bunch, gravely—Joe felt better—"but she is very unhappy now."

"No, she ain't," said Joe.

"How do you know?" asked Mother Bunch.

"'Cause she's so wicked."

"But wicked people sometimes are very sorry."

"Polly ain't," said Joe.

"I am sure she is," replied Mother Bunch.

"How does you know, Miss Vera?"

"Because I should be very unhappy if I was Polly."

"But you is you, Miss Vera, and Polly is Polly," argued Joe. "And you ain't one bit the same."

"Yes," said Mother Bunch in a puzzled voice, "of course we are different. I could not be Polly and Polly could not be me."

"Then how," said Joe, triumphantly, "does you know that Polly is unhappy?"

"Because," said Mother Bunch, thoughtfully, wrinkling her eyebrows like a real old lady, "even if I am not Polly, I can feel how Polly would feel. I know she is dreadfully unhappy. I cannot tell how I know these things, Joe, but I sit still and think of GOD,—and then I suppose the angels whisper them. Polly and you were great friends, Joe."

"And a nice way her had of showing it," sneered Joe.

"But everybody is naughty sometimes," said Mother Bunch, "Aunt Cicely says so. But then we tell GOD we are sorry, and He is sorry for us, and forgives us."

Joe looked down, but answered nothing. Mother Bunch sat and thought, her eyes fixed upon the large root of white daisies. After a while she said, "Shall I tell you what I think I would do, Joe, if I were you?"

Joe brightened, "Go to Polly's garden and grab the hen-and-chicken back again?"

"No. I think I would take Polly that root of beautiful white daisies as a present."

Joe opened his mouth, but no words came.

"I don't know why I thought of it," said Mother Bunch, "the angels must have whispered it, I suppose, and if they whispered it, GOD told them, so it is sure to be right."

"The angels is in Heaven," said Joe stoutly, "they lives there."

"They are all about the world too," said Mother

Bunch, *quite* as decidedly as Joe. "It is in the Bible; I learnt it for a text. They are in the world to take care of us. If they did not, we should not be able to walk about; we should fall down and cut ourselves."

Joe glanced a little uneasily over one shoulder, then back again at Mother Bunch.

"What is the angels like, Miss Vera?"

"Beautiful, and shining, and dressed like the flowers, because GOD dresses them. That is a text too, about GOD dressing the flowers. And the flowers are beautiful because GOD dresses them, and the angels are lovely too."

"They must be a sight to see if they is anything like the flowers," said Joe admiringly. "And they re'lly take care on us, Miss Vera?"

"Yes."

"It is very good on 'em," said Joe, "it must be a powerful lot of trouble."

"And you will do what they whispered about the daisies?" said Mother Bunch.

Joe lifted himself upon his two feet, and looked at the root to which she pointed.

"It's the biggest in the garden," he said, sweeping a glance around.

"Yes," replied Mother Bunch with satisfaction, "and the daisies are the largest and the whitest; the angels always like the best."

"Her'll think I wants to make it up," objected Joe.

"So you do," said Mother Bunch.

"I don't think I does, Miss Vera," said Joe, but very feebly. Then he dug his grubby hands deep down in the soft moist mould, and with a sigh as deep, he upheaved the root of daisies, and tucked it under his arm. "Please will you come with me, Miss Vera?" he said humbly.

Mother Bunch said "Yes." It was not many yards to Polly's cottage, but she was not in the garden. The door was ajar, and they peeped into the tiny kitchen. Polly was there alone; she turned her back upon them as they entered, but not before

Mother Bunch's quick eyes had seen that she was crying.

"I've brought you a root of white daisies, Polly," said Joe. "He's the best and biggest in the garden,"—with a sigh, "but," with a deeper sigh and still greater effort, "you're welcome to him."

Polly turned quickly round, the tears streaming down her cheeks.

"I doesn't want the daisies," she sobbed, "none of 'em. I've been—so—very—unhappy, and I wanted *you*, Joe."

Mother Bunch waited to see Joe drying Polly's tears with the soiled smock which had dried so many of his own; then she set off, for she did not want to be late for the fairies. But as she was going, she heard an amiable quarrel between them as to who should have the roots of hen-and-chicken and white daisies; Joe protesting he didn't mind anything now they had "made it up, and she was welcome to 'em all," and Polly declaring she should

never abide the sight of them unless they were growing in Joe's garden.

Polly had her way, for they soon overtook Mother Bunch, each bearing a root of the daisies to be replanted in their former home. They both looked quite happy, but very draggled, for tears and dirt are not an addition to beauty. Joe earnestly begged Miss Vera would wait while he picked her a nosegay of his choicest and best. But Mother Bunch shook her head, she could not stay; Polly dropped her a curtsey down to the ground, perhaps to atone for her bad manners when first they met; while Joe made her a bow, in which respect and admiration were equally mixed, and Mother Bunch again went on her way.

She did not want to miss the fairies. "When the sun is going to bed," said Sylvia, and the sun had a small piece yet to travel before he drew his beautiful coloured curtains around him, and tucked himself up for the night. She stopped at the bottom of the hill, for there was old Sykes's cottage

still unlet, and she had never passed that way, winter or summer, that the old man had not stood at the gate with a 'posy' for her in his trembling hands. Mother Bunch tip-toed and peeped over the gate, thinking regretfully of her old friend, "His legs were shaky, and he ached all over," she said out loud, "but now GOD has given him two straight legs and he doesn't ache at all;" and she toiled up the hill with the image of her old friend, not as she had seen him, but tall, and strong, and painless, filling her mind.

The Fairies' Hollow was deserted, except by animal life; only the talking of the merry brook, the splashing of the silver trout, and the 'good-night' song of the birds broke the silence. There were no pic-nic people that day.

Mother Bunch sat down and waited. There were no signs of the fairies yet, but she did not mind waiting. There was plenty to amuse her, for the animals were not afraid of her, and behaved as if she were not there. A mother rabbit brought

her children out to have a game of play, and they frolicked about Mother Bunch without fear, for she sat quite still and upright upon the grass, admired them very much, but did not attempt to catch them. A little silver trout, whose spirits were too high, overleapt himself, and fell, not into the talkative brook, but upon the green grass, where he lay kicking and panting, until Mother Bunch gently picked him up and put him back into the water again. The grasshoppers bounded into her lap, and knocked against her sun-bonnet; and the little green frogs, who came out for a game of play in the sunset hour, jumped one or two of them upon her hand, and looked at her for full a second with their goggle eyes before they took a header into the soft, mossy grass, and from thence to the weeds which grew by the merry brown brook.

Mother Bunch was strangely brave and fearless, nothing daunted her. When she could only just walk, she was found one evening in the midst of

the cows, as they were returning from being milked, patting their thin legs with her soft, dimpled hands, and crooing to them in a low voice as she trotted securely among them. Bill and Nancy would shriek and hop off as if they were treading upon hot plates if they only caught sight of a black beetle; while even the elders would pick up their skirts and get hurriedly out of the way,—but Mother Bunch was afraid of nothing. "Why is you afraid?" she said when four years old, "it is only alive." The animals in return were certainly not afraid of her, and, I think, one of the reasons for this was that she sat so *very* still. They say that if people cannot sit *quite* still it is the sign of a shallow mind; and there was a great man who said he had succeeded in life because when he was a little boy his mother had taught him to sit still, first for a few minutes at a time, until he was able to sit still for half an hour, and so on.

I do not mean the stillness of when you are reading and writing, but when you are doing no-

thing, to have the power of repose, and not fidget those who are around you. Mother Bunch needed no teaching, it came naturally to her; but though she sat that evening motionless as a statue, there were no signs of the fairies. She peeped under the big dock-leaves, looked closely at the boughs as they quivered in the evening breeze, yet the fairies did not show themselves, and she watched in vain. She did not give up hope for some time, but gazed at the sun preparing for bed with grave, wide-open eyes, and if the branch of a tree flickered more than usual, she thought it might be a fairy swinging upon it,—but there was none.

When she could wait no longer, she turned her steps homewards, trying to account for the absence of the fairies. Perhaps they were busy; perhaps they had gone to bed earlier; perhaps their mothers wanted them; perhaps—

By this time she had arrived at the church, and, as was always her custom, she turned aside into it to say a prayer. She was not alone, for

Crapps, the organist, was practising, and Mother Bunch, who loved music, sat up in her seat, after she had finished her prayer, to listen to it for a few seconds. The music was soft, and so was the light which came through the stained glass windows. It shone more brightly through those which faced the west, for the sunset tints were still gleaming radiantly. Upon the window where Mother Bunch's eyes were fixed, was a figure of S. John, the Apostle of love, his hands uplifted as if to give a blessing.

"What a beautiful blue dress he has," she thought, "and what a kind face!" She remembered Joe's question, "What are the angels like?" and she thought they must be like S. John. He was smiling at her,—that was *very* kind of him, she had never seen him smile at her before, though she had often looked at him. She smiled at him in return. How large he was growing. Now he was *quite* tall, and was stepping out of his window and coming towards her. That was kinder still,

for Mother Bunch had often felt she should like to talk to him. He was holding out his arms, still smiling, and she tried to get up to meet him, but could not move. He was larger and taller, and was coming nearer, nearer to her. His lovely blue robe and shining face were quite close to her; his arms were stretched out to take her into them. Dear, kind S. John! She felt *very* tired and sleepy,—she would cuddle into his arms, lay her head upon his shoulder, and . . . . .

Mother Bunch was fast asleep!

CHAPTER V.

Humfray tells the Story.

MOTHER BUNCH SEES ANGELS INSTEAD OF FAIRIES.

MR. Pippo arrived, and we were all out except Mother Bunch and Gordon. It was they who gave him the name of Mr. Pippo, and I do not believe we shall ever call him anything else, for it seems to fit him somehow.

We asked him if he would mind, and he said, "Not at all," he liked it, because it sounded so friendly. He is quite different from Ted, for he is short, and thin, and dark, very shy and nervous, and does not talk much. Ted is tall and fair,

and talks from morning till night, and smokes all day long in the garden. Mr. Pippo does not smoke.

Mother Bunch, who always has her wits about her, provided him with tea, for he was very thirsty, and when we came in we took him for a walk. It was very up-hill work at first, I never knew anybody so painfully shy, but he was more at his ease when we returned, though he still dragged. It would have taken an age before we really got intimate with him,—for I fancy he is naturally reserved,—if something had not happened the same evening he arrived, which broke the ice, and made him more at home with us.

When we sat down to tea there were three places empty,—those of Bill, Nancy, and Mother Bunch. When Bill and Nan are late, we are sure they are in mischief, and we shrugged our shoulders and interchanged glances, as we wondered what they had been doing now. With Mother Bunch the case was different, it was most unusual

for her to be absent, and Isabel sent to see whether being later than usual, she had had her supper with Gordon, and gone to bed. Phyllis came back and said that Nurse had put Gordon to bed, and gone out; and Elizabeth thought she had taken Miss Vera with her, as her cotton bonnet and walking boots were not in their places.

"Nurse ought to have brought her back by this time," said Isabel.

"And Bill and Nancy ought to learn better manners," said Grandfather Sylvester, rather sternly. "Does any one know where they are?"

No one did. Ethelred was the last who had seen them,—about half-past five o'clock in the stables with Pat.

We felt very uncomfortable as we began our tea. Ten minutes later in came, or rather, in tumbled Bill and Nan. Bill looked like one of those large tawny lilies in the garden, and Nan was the colour of a boiled lobster. Their attempts to tidy themselves had been done in such a hurry, that

they had better have left it alone altogether. They have so little hair, and the little they have is of such a fluffy nature that it would not be much amiss if they never brushed it; but Nan had pinned on a grand lace thing round her neck, by way of being smart, and had put it on the back part in front. Several pricklyburrs hung about her, and her face was smeared, for she had only half-washed it. Bill had a soiled cuff and a clean one, and a large chalk mark down his jacket, and was dusty about the knees as if he had had a fall, but, upon the whole, he put in a better appearance than Nancy.

They had both what Ethelred calls their tail-between-the-legs expression, and they *sneaked* in, each pushing the other to make him or her go first into the room. Mr. Pippo rose, and they were introduced to him, and I saw them start, and distinctly heard Nan say to Bill, "Why he *has* come." And Bill answered, "I wonder how he got here."

We were dreadfully ashamed of their manners,

and I do not know what Mr. Pippo must have thought of them; for Bill just said very gruffly down in his boots, "How de do?" and Nancy held out a red and rather dirty hand, shrugged one shoulder up to the ear and muttered "De do;" then they were going to their places when Cousin Constance stopped them.

Cousin Constance and Isabel are both short-sighted, and I had seen Isabel put up her eye-glass and look at Bill and Nan; then she said something to Cousin Constance, who put up her eye-glass also and looked, and then spoke to them.

"Go to your rooms and make yourselves clean and tidy. Come back as soon as you are respectable."

They obeyed. When they returned and had taken their places Grandfather Sylvester said,

"What made you so late?"

They did not answer. Bill nudged Nan; but she only hung her head and went on eating very fast.

"What made you so late?" repeated Grandfather Sylvester.

They knew by Grandfather's tone that he meant to have an answer, so Bill after a hopeless look at Nan, who would not raise her eye from her plate, said,

"We went to the station to meet Mr. Stevens."

"That was very thoughtful of you," said Grandfather Sylvester. "But you know that I usually go to the station to meet my own guests."

Nancy grew redder, if that were possible, when she was as red almost as she could be, and she murmured something about "wanting to see Mr. Stevens."

"Ah, that was it; curiosity is at the bottom of a great deal of mischief. But when the train arrived without Mr. Stevens why did you not return home at once?" said Grandfather Sylvester.

Both hung their heads.

"We took Pat," said Bill, in a mild voice.

Our tongues were unloosed at this: we had never

dreamt that even Bill and Nan could be so insane as to take Pat to the station, and a regular chatter arose; we forgot Mr. Pippo in our excitement.

"Fancy taking Pat to the station!" said one.

"I wonder what mischief he has been in now," said another.

"Yes, of all places the station!" said a third.

"Has he been unpicking any more bonnets?" asked Ethelred.

"N—o," said Bill, looking at Nancy to help him, and giving her such a nudge that he nearly pushed her off her chair.

"He only," said Nancy meekly, plaiting the end of the tablecloth into a pattern, "ate up the station-master's shoes."

We could not help laughing; even Grandfather Sylvester smiled, underneath his moustache.

"I hope he will find them digestible," said Ethelred. "At any rate they are a tougher morsel than Cook's bonnet, for Pratt is a big man. Nearly

as tall as Grandfather Sylvester and much bigger—broader, I mean."

"I don't believe he did eat them," said Gay decidedly. Gay has got what we call a "habit of unbelief." He thinks it his duty to protest occasionally.

Bit by bit we dragged the whole story from them though they were most unwilling to tell it. They were so anxious to see Mr. Pippo that when they returned from their walk with Cousin Constance, instead of coming into the house, where they would have found he had already arrived, they went straight to the stables, fetched Pat and marched off with him to the station. There is nothing Bill and Nan like so well as hanging about the station, and they were exceedingly happy until they missed Pat from their side and saw him careering up and down the line. An express train was due, and a porter saved him only just in time, or he would certainly have been cut in two. Pratt, the station-master, came up, and when he found they were

waiting for a train that was not due for another hour, and that they had no leash in which to hold Pat, he suggested that they should shut him up in his little sitting-room as the safest way of keeping him out of mischief.

Bill and Nan consented, and Pat was left lying comfortably and contentedly stretched out upon the hearth-rug. When the train arrived and no Mr. Pippo in it they went to fetch Pat, and found him quietly finishing the last slipper ; a few shreds strewn about were all that remained of Pratt's pair of carpet slippers. They offered to buy another pair—so they said—but we all agreed we had no doubt that the offer was made in an I-hope-you-won't-accept-it voice. Pratt was very kind, would not hear of their buying another pair of slippers ; said that those Pat had eaten were rather old and shabby, and it would be a real excuse for him to treat himself to a new pair, as he could not go without. I think Pratt is one of "Nature's gentlemen."

Upon the road home Pat had seized a hat off a little girl's head, and it was the chase he led them after this hat that had made them so hot and late.

"I wish Colonel Gordon had not given you Pat," said Grandfather Sylvester. "He is a fine animal, and you will ruin him. But as you are so thoughtless, and might risk your lives at the station, I must make a rule that you go there neither with nor without Pat, unless one of us accompany you. If you disobey I shall take Pat from you and give him to Ethelred or Humfray."

This thoroughly aroused them, and they promised with the greatest earnestness that they would obey. Just then Frederick opened the door in his Jack-in-the-box fashion: he quite forgot to be shy in his anxiety to speak, and his words flew out as if they came from a catapult.

"Please, sir, Nurse have come in this very minute, and she have not seen Miss Vera since four o'clock this afternoon."

We were very much alarmed, though when we talked it over, we did not see that there was any cause for fear. Mother Bunch is not like the twins, she is as steady as a real old lady, and would not dream of getting into mischief. Everybody in the village knows her, and would not hurt a hair of her head. Gipsies and tramps were the only danger we could imagine; we have not seen a gipsy so far as we can remember, and tramps are very few, and those only ordinary poor men who beg for a meal, not fierce and rough as we read of them in books. And we could not for a moment fancy that one of these could carry away our Mother Bunch.

We started to search for her at once, dispersing in various directions. We left Isabel in a terrible state; she was crying, and sobbing, and wringing her hands, and saying she was always sure some harm would happen to the child. Cousin Constance stayed with her until she was quieter.

No sooner had the news spread than the whole village turned out to help us look for Mother Bunch; each felt in a way that she belonged to him or her, they were all so fond of her. Now the anxiety is over I cannot help laughing at the remembrance.

People at Cool-Dillay get up so early for their work that they go to rest with the birds. A great many of them were already in bed, and in their haste to come to our assistance they turned out in every manner of guise or disguise. Some had forgotten to take off their nightcaps, others waited only to put on part of their clothes and wrapped themselves in blankets, and great coats, and shawls. It was not dark but dusky, the twilight which lingers long, but is, as Grandfather Sylvester says, a "bewildering light." Torches were therefore made and lighted, and while this was being done we found that Joe Baker was the last who had seen Mother Bunch. Joe said she left their cottage near upon seven, as he judged

from the sun, and she made as if for the Fairies' Hollow.

Isabel's crying fit was over, and she joined us with Cousin Constance. Isabel was quiet, but looked like a ghost; I never saw anybody so white, as the light from the torches fell upon her. The whole procession,—we counted afterwards there must have been nearly a hundred of us, men, women, and children,—went off at full speed for the Fairies' Hollow. The trees looked blackly black in the depth of the Hollow, and the stream a dead white,—it is really rather brown,—as the light from the red torches glared over everything.

There was an intense silence, no one spoke, as we looked anxiously about, for we thought Mother Bunch might have been tired, and staying to rest here, might have fallen asleep. A little bird awakened by the light began to sing; then, finding he had made a mistake, stopped as suddenly as he had begun.

"She is not here," said Grandfather Sylvester; then there was silence, for we did not know what to do next. Little Polly Beaver broke the silence by a burst of tears; this started Isabel, who began to cry again, and I really think the whole of us would have followed, crying is so catching, if mother had not suddenly said brightly and cheerfully, and oh! how grateful we were to her for saying it,

"I do believe the dear child may have fallen asleep in the church; she is so fond of going into it."

What a shout there was at the suggestion! It must have been heard a mile away; everybody turned to try who could be first for the key of the church. The poor old rector was last; he was old and lame from the gout, and he ought not to have been out in the search, but Mother Bunch was his favourite parishioner, and he could not rest in the house when he found she was missing.

Ethelred outran us and got the key first, but

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after unlocking the door we waited for Isabel. Only one man, Frederick, went in with the torch, then Isabel, and then some of us crept in softly after her, I amongst the number. There we saw Mother Bunch, curled in a corner of one of the low oak seats, sleeping quite as peacefully as if she lay in her own little bed at home.

Isabel caught her up in her arms and bore her out into the air. There was again such a shout as everybody pressed round to catch a glimpse of her.

She opened her eyes and smiled as she saw the well-known faces around her, but she was not in the least astonished or alarmed.

"I was asleep in the church," she said, "and I awoke and it was very dark, and then the angels came."

This was one of those queer things that Mother Bunch always says, and after she had said it she turned her head and went soundly asleep again. She was too heavy for Isabel who is very delicate,

so Grandfather Sylvester carried her home. He would trust her to no one but himself, he said, though Ethelred and I both asked to be allowed to carry her. She was so sound asleep that she did not awake again, not even when she was undressed and put into bed.

CHAPTER VI.

Humfray tells the Story.

MOTHER BUNCH'S FIRST ATTEMPT AT GARDENING.

WE were all very tired the day after our adventure, but not Mother Bunch herself. She did not seem to remember much about it; except that the angels came. However, we found out why she had gone at that time of day to the Fairies' Hollow. Sylvia had answered a question at random, and told her the fairies came out at sunset. As Mother Bunch always believes everything she is told, she had gone to the Fairies' Hollow at that particular hour in order to see the fairies themselves.

But "she saw angels instead of fairies," Grandfather Sylvester said.

Ted ran down from Saturday to Monday, and heard of our torchlight expedition, and wished, with all his heart, that he had been with us. He told us, privately, the reason poor Mr. Pippo is so sad and depressed. Since his father's death he has had nothing to live upon except what he earns by selling his pictures, and sometimes he is very unsuccessful, and has really not enough money to buy himself sufficient food and clothes. And Ted says he is proud, and there is no way of helping him. We felt dreadfully sorry, and tried to persuade Mr. Pippo to pay us a long visit, but he shook his head, and said he could not afford the time, however much he would like it, but that he must go back to work. Since Ted left though, a very happy idea struck him, and we are all so delighted about it. I do not remember if I explained that we are a very common-place family. We are none of us famous for anything: not one of us is beautiful, indeed some

of us are undeniably plain: none of us are clever, or gifted, or geniuses, or in fact anything but very ordinary. But Mr. Pippo has been struck by what Grandfather Sylvester calls the two extremes, the good one, and the scaramouch—Mother Bunch and Pat! He thinks Pat's colour so uncommon, and indeed it is. He is a brilliant red; something the colour of the sun when he is setting—a ball of fire. And then Mr. Pippo admires Mother Bunch. He says it is so rare to see such a grave, earnest, steadfast look in a child so young, and he wants Isabel to let her sit for her picture, and Pat is to be in it also. He told us, getting very red and shy over it, that he has been trying for the last four years to get a picture into the Royal Academy, but that each year they have been rejected, and now he wants to make a picture of Pat and Mother Bunch, and to try again for the last time. He has made it up in his mind already. Mother Bunch is to be sitting upon the floor with Pat lying at her feet. She is to be holding up her finger at him,

and Pat is to look very sorry, and Mother Bunch is supposed to be saying, "Who stole the cake?"

Of course Isabel said 'yes,' she was only too glad Mr. Pippo should paint Vera if it would be any help to him, and of course Bill and Nan were up in the skies about Pat. They strutted about with such a consequential air, that Grandfather Sylvester said that they reminded him of a couple of Bantams. This was the beginning of Pat's introduction to the house. Now he is in and out whenever he pleases, and no one objects. Indeed I suppose every one imagines that Mr. Pippo wants him, and we are all fond of Pat, so we like to have him about the house to pet and make much of.

Now we have Mr. Pippo for a month for certain. He went away to London to fetch his canvas and other materials, and has settled down to work. Mother Bunch sat at once just as he wanted her, and as still as if she had been really a picture and not a living child: and there was the very expression he wanted in her face. But Pat! He is better with

Mother Bunch than with anybody else, but Bill and Nan have spoilt him dreadfully, and it is hard to coax him into anything like stillness. They have to take him for a very long walk before each sitting, then he is so dusty, that he has to be well brushed and rubbed; by this time he is somewhat tired and depressed, and he is rather glad to stretch himself at Mother Bunch's feet, and lie still. His expression of penitence and remorse Mr. Pippo will have to imagine, for Pat never looks anything but stupidly, provokingly happy and delighted.

Another odd thing happened yesterday, that is why I am writing this chapter. It was such a very odd thing that we have not got over it yet, and when I awoke this morning I thought for the first minute or two that it was a dream and not a reality. The Lady's Walk is a raised terrace just underneath the kitchen garden wall: there are four or five steps cut out of the earth, then a little wicket-gate, and then you enter upon a broad gravel path with a strip of ground bordered with

box upon the left-hand side close under the garden wall. This is the piece Grandfather Sylvester has given to Mother Bunch: she has it all to herself, for our gardens are down by the shrubbery quite in another direction. What with one interruption and another, for sitting to Mr. Pippo absorbs a good deal of time, Mother Bunch has been so occupied that she did not take possession of her garden until yesterday.

Then she asked Roger, the "odd boy," to help her: we call him that because he does all sorts of odds and ends—anything that is wanted, in fact, but he has no more notion of gardening than a bumble bee, and is about as clumsy. His one idea is to dig as deep as he can, and to scatter the earth all over the place. Any of us would have done it for Mother Bunch with the greatest pleasure, but she wanted Roger; I fancy because she knew how happy it would make him; and they set off for the Lady's Walk, Roger with a delighted face shouldering the biggest spade he could find,

and Vera with a trowel and a basket full of cuttings and plants which we had given her.

Ethelred and I sauntered in, in the course of the morning, to see how matters were progressing, and we found it was just what we had thought—the earth dug up very deep, scattered all over the walk; Roger, very hot and dirty, digging deeper still, Mother Bunch the picture of patience standing by, her basket and trowel at her feet.

"Hullo," called out Ethelred, "you are pegging away at a fine rate. Not quite so hard, young man, if you please, Miss Vera does not want you to go to the centre of the earth."

Roger rested for a moment, hot and panting.

"It's a verra hard loomp, sir, that I can't break no how," he said, and gave such a determined dig that he nearly broke his wrist, and snapped the spade where the wooden part joins the iron.

"It's the verra hardest loomp of mould I ever come across," he said. "Miss Vee-ra, I must go fetch another spade."

"Did it never occur to you, Roger," said Ethelred, "that the lump may be something harder than earth? If you look you may find you are fighting against a stone."

The idea being put into Roger's head, he leaned over the deep, deep hole he had made, and felt about it with his hand.

"You're about right, Mr. Ethelred," he said with a chuckle, "it's a stone, and a cold one," and then he pulled out not, as he thought, a stone, but a small iron box with bands of iron across it, the sight of which made Ethelred and myself press forward.

Roger looked hopelessly at Mother Bunch. "It's never a stone arter all, Miss Vee-ra. It's a box."

"Will it open?" asked Mother Bunch quietly, as if it was an every-day occurrence to have iron boxes dug up in gardens.

"It's done up as tight as a hedgehog, Miss Vee-ra," said Roger.

"We must take it to Grandfather Sylvester," said Ethelred and I together; and we took the box from Roger and carried it to him at once; guessing upon the road every possible thing it could be, and being so stupid that we never once guessed right; we were not even "warm," as we said afterwards.

Grandfather Sylvester was quite as much astonished and excited over it, as we were. He said it must be opened in the presence of all of us; so we collected the family in Grandfather's room, Mr. Pippo among them: he was not one of the family, but we did not wish to leave him out.

Grandfather Sylvester fetched some tools, and began to force the lock; we waited in breathless silence, wondering what could be in the box, Bill and Nan nearly in Grandfather's pockets with eagerness and curiosity. Gordon was the only one who spoke; he had climbed into an arm-chair, and knelt upon the cushions, thumping his tiny, closed fists upon the table and calling out,

"Open it kick, Grandfather Sylvester, please open it kick."

The iron was rusty and resisted the tools for some time.

"Kick, Grandfather Sylvester, *please* be kick," said Gordon again.

"I am as quick as I can be, Gordon," said Grandfather Sylvester, "and please do not drum upon the table."

Gordon leant upon his elbows, and got as close as he could.

The lock was forced at last. Inside the iron box lay a small morocco case: Grandfather Sylvester opened it and turned it so that we could all see: the satin lining was yellow with age, and upon it rested a ring—a plain thick gold band with a large sapphire set clear and surrounded with a circle of tiny diamonds. Before we could speak Grandfather Sylvester took up the ring and read the motto engraven inside it—

"Le jour viendra." "The day will come."

"The Lady's ring," we all exclaimed.

"We score. Cousin Ted is nowhere—the sceptic," said Gay triumphantly.

There was a buzz of excitement and talking—the ring passing from hand to hand. Grandfather Sylvester leaned back in his chair looking quite delighted, as indeed he was. He takes great interest in that story of the first Humfray and Phyllis, and has always been vexed that the ring was missing and could not be found. We wondered how it was it came to be there, and we concluded that Humfray having outlived Phyllis—as we could tell from the date upon the monument,—had buried it in the Lady's Walk with his own hands; though why he did not give it to one of his children was a puzzle to us, and one we could not unravel.

"What idiots we were never to have guessed what it was," said Ethelred; "we are witless creatures."

"Speak for yourself," said Gay, "I'm off to write

at once to Ted. I shall like having the whip-hand over him for once."

"Roger dug it up," said Mother Bunch.

We all laughed at the reminder, and I said, "Well, Mother Bunch, we will not abuse Roger's digging any more."

"It was good digging if it dug up a box," she answered.

That is another thing about Mother Bunch, she clings to her point as a limpet clings to a rock. Grandfather Sylvester gave her a shilling to give to Roger; it is riches to him, and he is so happy over it, that I am afraid he will think it is his vocation to dig as deeply as he can, upon the chance of lighting upon more boxes, or other hidden treasures.

Mr. Pippo left to-day to buy some things he requires in London for his painting. He returns in a day or two. While we were standing at the hall door wishing him a pleasant journey, Gordon rushed in from the garden, and threw himself upon

Grandfather Sylvester's legs, which are as far as he can reach.

"Grandfather Sylvester," he panted, "ask Mr. Pippo to tum again. Ask him to tum and 'tay again."

"He is coming back in a day or two, my boy," said Grandfather, and Gordon rushed at Mr. Pippo.

"Now don't you forget," he said; "now mind you do not forget."

"What?" asked Mr. Pippo, "What do you wish me to remember?"

"Has you forgot a'ready?" said Gordon, in a voice of reproof. "Why, your welwet coat, and your welwet waistcoat, and your yellow 'tockings, and your welwet knee-breeches tied with yellow ribbon, and your tunflower."

Poor Mr. Pippo! all his shyness returned as Gordon gave out the list, as if he was reading an account of Mr. Pippo's wardrobe.

"We will watch for you from dee nursery win-

dow," continued Gordon. "Vera and me. Do not forget *this* time, Mr. Pippo, please."

Then Mr. Pippo explained, stammering over it, that it was some nonsense of Ted's, and he had forgotten, but it seems Gordon had not.

Grandfather Sylvester laughed.

"You will increase the weight of Mr. Pippo's luggage with all that finery, Gordon," he said. And then to Mr. Pippo, "You must not let the boy tax your good-nature."

"Oh, I'll bring it with pleasure," said Mr. Pippo, eagerly. "If you will not think it odd if I put it on some evening to please him, and to show the children."

Phyllis and Sylvia declared they were quite as anxious to see a fancy dress as ever the children were, and we quite believed them. It was explained to Gordon that he need not spend his time at the nursery window, for the "pretty dress," as Mother Bunch called it, would arrive in a box, and not upon Mr. Pippo, and Gordon went off content.

"The welwet would 'poil if it got dusty in the train," we heard him explain to Vera, "but if he wears it in the evening it will be just the same."

"Yes," replied Mother Bunch, "just the same."

CHAPTER VII.

Humfray tells the Story.

"MISFORTUNES NEVER COME SINGLY."

WE are in what Cook calls a "peck of troubles," and ours is more than a peck, I am sure, and gets fuller. I do not remember when we have had such a bad time as we are having now. Outside, too, it is beautiful, what Grandfather Sylvester says is "an old-fashioned summer," but we cannot enjoy it. On the contrary, we feel it is unkind of the sun to shine so brightly, and the birds to sing so cheerfully when we are depressed and anxious and nearer to tears than laughter.

To tell about them I must go back. Mr. Pippo

stayed a month ; he worked very hard all the time he was here, and thinks now he can manage without his models. He has a coloured photograph of Mother Bunch, and a curl of Pat's red hair, and if he forgets anything he knows he can always run down for a day or two ; we are quite ready to give him a welcome. I believe he was really fatter when he left, at any rate, as Ethelred said, "you couldn't quite see through him."

It was after he had gone that our troubles began, and they commenced with Sylvia. One afternoon a lady, a great friend of Cousin Constance's, came to call. She is very nice, but she has a funny, rather affected way, at least it seems affected to us, of lifting up her hands and saying, "Oh, dear me," or "You don't say so!" She does it very often, and Sylvia, who was in the room when she was calling, imitated her after she had taken her leave. Grandfather Sylvester overheard her, and was more angry than ever I have known him before. Sylvia had such a scolding, and was

fairly terrified. Grandfather Sylvester told her that it was a most unchristian and unladylike action; that boys or girls who indulged in the habit of mimicking others never failed to grow up spiteful, uncharitable, a terror to their neighbours, and disliked by all who came across their path. He pointed out that there was much, even in the best of us, that others might laugh at, if they were so inclined. He reminded her of the lines,

> "Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us,
> To see oursel's as others see us."

He said too that Sylvia ought to take a higher view of the matter, and to remember that by "likeness we draw near to GOD, by unlikeness we depart from Him," and that by giving way to the unkind habit of mimicking others we are most unlike our LORD, and set a barrier between ourselves and Him. He gave her as a punishment not to have tea with us for a whole week. We were all of us present during Sylvia's scolding, and after she had left the room he told us the reason

he had spoken so strongly to her was, that he saw she had a natural cleverness for imitating people. To many there would not be the same temptation as there was to her, as it is not everybody who has a talent for mimicking. I do not think any of the rest of us have, but we have often been amused at Sylvia, and laughed at her, and encouraged her, for which we also got a scolding, as we told Grandfather Sylvester that it was a great deal our fault. It amused us, and therefore we encouraged her. Grandfather Sylvester spoke with great emphasis when he said it was a most *wicked* habit, and one against which, as a Christian and a gentleman, he found himself bound to protest with all his heart. We shall none of us ever forget what he said, nor will Sylvia ever attempt, nor we urge her, to mimic anybody again.

We were dreadfully sorry for her punishment, and felt it, I believe, almost as much as she did. She is a favourite with us, for she is so kind and obliging, always sewing our buttons on our gloves,

mending our socks, or helping us in any way she can. And the week of her solitary tea seemed as if it would never pass; we hated ourselves for laughing, when we remembered how easily our voices could be heard in the schoolroom.

That was trouble No. 1. Trouble No. 2 might have been laughable, and I do not suppose we should have reckoned it as a trouble if it had not come at a time when everything seemed destined to go wrong. It was Bill and Nan this time, and I am afraid if their scrape had not affected us we should not have thought much about it. It is so natural for them to get into mischief that, excepting that we tease them and try to sit upon them, we take it as a matter of course.

Across the road opposite to our grounds is our Home Field. One day Grandfather Sylvester told Bill and Nan to be sure to remember not to take Pat into it for the next fortnight, as he had lent it to Farmer Bell for his sheep to graze in it for that time. Unfortunately the Home Field is a short

cut to several places, and Bill and Nan returning from a walk, and fearing they were late for tea, turned into it, forgetting what Grandfather Sylvester had said. They saw the sheep and remembered, but it was too late, Pat was all over the field, biting the heels of one sheep, barking at another, scampering after a third, and so on, Bill and Nan rushing frantically after him, calling upon him, imploring him, entreating him to desist. They could not get him to heel until he had worried a poor sheep so badly that it had to be killed. Grandfather Sylvester paid Farmer Bell the full price for it, and said the schoolroom party were to have it for dinner until it was eaten.

We never knew there could be the amount of meat in any animal that there was in that sheep. We had to eat the whole of it,—head, legs, shoulders, and tail,—no, I do not fancy we had the tail, unless it was done up in a disguised way and did not look like a tail. Cook was very kind. She did her best to make the sheep better for us by

cooking it in different ways; it was fricasseed, roasted, boiled, stewed, hashed, minced, made into broth, fried with egg, and broiled. But no alteration of cooking could make it anything but mutton, and we none of us like mutton, indeed Bill and Nan positively *dislike* it. We bore it very patiently until one day when the fourth leg appeared. Nan burst into tears and declared she was sure Cook was cheating, and that that was the *fifth* leg we had had, while Bill took her part and said he was positive no sheep could have such a quantity of meat in it. Then we turned upon them, the whole of us except Mother Bunch and Gordon, and reminded them plainly that it was for their fault we were suffering. They were more subdued after that and we heard no more grumbles. Our dinners,—until we saw the last of the mutton —were eaten in gloomy silence. Then, when Cook assured us it was really gone, a deputation waited upon mother, who is housekeeper, to beg the school party might live upon vegetables, and fruit,

and pudding. Mother laughed, and said the weather was so warm and vegetable diet would not hurt us, and she gave orders to Cook that we were to be vegetarians until she told her to the contrary.

A good result however followed from that unfortunate sheep: and I believe it was the lesson Grandfather Sylvester meant we should learn. We began to realise that Bill and Nan were part of ourselves; that we were in a measure responsible for them; instead of laughing at them and teasing them, we began to watch to see if we could not prevent some of their scrapes by reminding them. We saved them from several in this manner, but they did not like being looked after, nor did we receive any gratitude for our attentions.

Trouble 3 is much more important, for it has not ceased yet, and it is causing a great deal of anxiety and worry. The ring that was found in the Lady's Walk was kept in Grandfather Sylvester's study—lying in the day-time upon his

writing-table in its morocco case, the lid open, on a stand which has been made for it : many people have seen it and have been interested in hearing the story and how oddly it was found.

One morning Sylvia was not very well, and she went to sit in the large arm-chair in Grandfather Sylvester's study. After lessons were over Phyllis followed to ask if she was better, and standing talking to Grandfather, she took up the ring and tried it upon her third finger. It would not go upon any but the little finger, and for that it was rather large. Grandfather told her she had not so small a hand as her namesake, and Phyllis asked if she might wear it for a while, as she was going to stay with Sylvia. Grandfather Sylvester said 'yes,' but that she must be sure to return it to its case. Just then Frederick went in to ask if Ikkey might speak to Grandfather. Grandfather said he was to be shown into the study ; Phyllis left the writing-table and went to Sylvia's arm-chair to ask her if she was well enough to hold some

worsted for her while she wound it. Sylvia held the worsted, and the two girls talked together while Grandfather Sylvester did his business with Ikkey.

About the remainder nothing seems very clear. When the winding was finished there was a cry in the hall that Bill and Nancy had found a tiny cub, and Phyllis and Sylvia ran out to see. When they returned Ikkey was alone in the study, Grandfather Sylvester having gone to fetch something. Sylvia sat down again in the large arm-chair—the invalid's arm-chair—a voice called Phyllis, and she put out her right hand to slip the ring from the finger of her left and replace it in its case—when she found no ring was there.

Of course Phyllis was in great distress, but—excepting that mother scolded her for having worn the ring—we none of us fretted much over the loss: Phyllis had only gone from the study to the hall, and we thought the ring could not be far off, and all of us set to work to hunt for it.

Matters grew more serious when the ring did not appear. Every crevice and crack was thoroughly searched; the study and hall both turned out, every article of furniture moved; there is very little in Grandfather Sylvester's study, for he likes space to walk up and down and meditate. There is no carpet, only a few rugs, for the floor is oak, and these have been so thoroughly shaken and felt over that we have almost pulled them to pieces: the shining of the diamonds might have helped us, but no glimmer or shine have we seen—a few pins and one threepenny bit, and that has been all. The hall is more bare of furniture than the study, and that too has undergone a thorough examination, I do not believe there is a crack which has escaped our eyes. If Pat had not been safe in the stables I believe we should have accused him of having swallowed it.

That stupid Ikkey too must needs take it into his head that suspicion rests upon him. He was left alone in the study for about two minutes, and

he declares the blame must rest upon him of having, in that time, seen the ring lying upon the floor and picking it up; until the ring is found he says his character can't be cleared. We have known Ikkey all our lives, and would as soon think that *we* should do such a thing as Ikkey! It is no use telling him so however—the idea is in his head and won't leave it.

Trouble No. 4 is the last trouble, at present, and the worst. Dear Grandfather Sylvester is really ill—too ill to be with us, and our merry evening meal is now as gloomy as the sheep-dinners. We have lost heart. The elders think it is the trouble of the ring which prevents him from getting better—not the *loss* of the ring, but he is so sorry for Ikkey. Phyllis is quite unhappy, and we are too depressed ourselves to cheer her in any way. We feel as if dark clouds were gathering over us in spite of the out-door sunshine. I wish they would roll away, but the only cheering comes from Grandfather Sylvester himself. We are allowed to

go by turns into his bedroom, to sit with him for a few minutes each day, and he tells us we must wait patiently and remember the motto of the missing ring,

"*The day will come.*"

CHAPTER VIII.

The Story tells itself.

A POSY OF FORGET-ME-NOTS.

IKKEY was a young man about twenty-one, whom the young people at the House much liked. He was an amiable, pleasant-mannered fellow, always ready to do a good turn to his neighbours, and with a natural love for gardening. He was working at Lord Lattimer's place, some few miles distant, as one of the under-gardeners, and it was an acknowledged thing, that when Roberts, who was gardener at the House, should be promoted, as he hoped to be some day soon, to be head and chief at Lord Lattimer's,

Ikkey should step into his shoes. The grounds at the House were not large, and one man did the work very well.

Ikkey had no relations, and he lodged at Cool-Dillay. Many people wondered why he lived so far from his work, but the reason was no secret to his friends and neighbours. The man and woman with whom he lodged had a daughter named Annie. At present he had not sufficient means upon which to marry, but when he succeeded to Roberts, the wedding would take place.

It was about a fortnight after the mysterious loss of the ring, when Mother Bunch, late in the afternoon, was returning home across some fields, accompanied by Pat. He was always as steady as old Time with her, and would walk sedately by her side, without any attempt to catch the birds if they flew too low, to run after stray cocks and hens, chase the cats, or hunt the leaves as they dropped from the trees, and were blown hither and thither by the wind. He had an idea

that he must take care of Mother Bunch, while he knew his harum-scarum master and mistress could look after themselves. It was a sore point with these two that he would leave them any day to go with her, and that she had more control over him by the simple uplifting of her finger, than they had with all their coaxing, entreaties and caresses.

Mother Bunch walked with Pat by her side, one of her hands resting upon his large, red head. Through this field wandered the same slender brown stream which sang so merrily in the Fairies' Hollow, and Mother Bunch saw some man bending over it, his back being towards her. Perhaps he was picking watercress,—she waited, he turned, and she recognised Ikkey.

He was tying together a posy of forget-me-nots, the kind which grow in water, with thick, velvet smooth stalks and leaves, and larger flowers. Mother Bunch much preferred them to their thin-stalked, scraggy brethren which flourish by the

roadside and in the gardens; the latter kind bears quite a poor blossom in comparison, though the former, I believe, ought to be called Myosotis, by right. I prefer however the old-fashioned Forget-me-not, and it reminds us of the story, the prettiest of flower legends,—that when Adam had named the flowers, they all passed in review before GOD, and told Him what Adam had called them, but when this little blue flower came, it looked up to GOD, and said it could not remember what Adam had named it; and GOD said, "Forget-*Me*-not."

Ikkey was absorbed in his task, and did not heed the child and dog as they trod noiselessly over the short springy turf; Mother Bunch waited quietly by him until he had completed his nose-gay of bright blue flowers with their grey-green foliage, then she touched him upon his arm.

He had been looking very sad when Mother Bunch came up to him, but his face lighted from forehead to chin when he saw who it was beside

him; he stood bare-headed, his cap in his hand the while he was talking to her.

Mother Bunch and Pat were wide-awake, and both had the instinct of what Ikkey was about to do. Upon the ground lay his stick and a bundle; at the latter Pat smelled suspiciously, then looked at Mother Bunch, threw back his head and whined. He shared with most dogs a strong dislike to people going away, and Mother Bunch and he were both quite sure, when Ikkey stood making up his posy of forget-me-nots, with a sad face, and his bundle upon the ground, that he was upon the point of leaving his home. Pat, however, did not know the reason, nor for whom the posy was intended, while Mother Bunch guessed both.

"You are going away, Ikkey?" she said.

"Yes, Miss Vera."

"Why are you going?"

"Because of the ring, Miss Vera."

"Why 'because of the ring,' Ikkey?"

Ikkey's sinewy hands held the flowers tighter, while a gloomy expression came over his brown face as he said, looking at the grass under his feet,

"Because I can't bear it no longer, Miss Vera. Until that there ring is found I consider my character is clouded over. Nothing can be kinder than the ladies and gentlemen up at the House. I have no cause whatever to complain of they. They talk handsome about it,—it were only yesterday that Master Ethelred and Master Humfray said they no more believed 'twas I, than they believed 'twas their own selves. 'Tain't no use. As long as I was in that room about just when 'twas most likely the ring was lost, I can't get it out of my head but that the neighbours must think 'twas I. It seems to I as if the folks all look at me suspicious-like, and I daren't trust myself to pass the time of day to any of them for fear as they should cast it in my teeth. So I am on my road to Lunnon Town, there to wait until my

character is cleared, Miss Vera. But I don't somehow think now that that ring will ever be found again," and Ikkey's voice sank to the depths of despondency.

Mother Bunch was thoughtful. She waited a long while ere she broke the silence ; then she said softly,

"It must be *somewhere*."

"Ay, Miss Vera, but where ?"

Mother Bunch's eyes went over Ikkey's head and sought the sky, which matched in colour the flowers in Ikkey's hand.

"GOD knows," she said, "where the ring is, and He will tell us some day."

A bitter look swept across Ikkey's face.

"*Some day*," he repeated, sadly, scornfully. "Any way I can't bear to bide here. I've thrown up my situation, and I'm off to Lunnon Town, 'cause folks say it's a powerful place, and there's work there for everybody."

If Mother Bunch had been older she could have

told him differently. As it was she could only comfort him in her own fashion.

"Perhaps it will be some day *soon*," she said, "then you must come back *directly*. It does not take long to come from London. Mr. Pippo and Uncle Ted often come from there."

The bridging over of the distance was a sweet thought to Ikkey; he even smiled, wanly enough, but still a smile. They walked on in silence side by side, Pat depressed, with tail and ears hung down. Then Mother Bunch's soft, clear voice broke the stillness by saying decidedly,

"If Roberts gets moved over there,"—waving her small hand in the direction of Lord Lattimer's, "while you are away, we shall have to do without a gardener, for Grandfather Sylvester will not have *any one* but you in his place, Ikkey. He said so the other day."

The first ray of hope found its way into Ikkey's heart at these words. Quite a glad light shone in his eyes as he turned them gratefully upon Mother

Bunch, who walked beside him so calm and grave, looking steadfastly straight before her. He trod more firmly and held his head more erect, for her words, spoken so gently, yet decidedly, seemed to bear a promise that some time in the future the dark clouds would lift and show their silver lining.

Nothing more was said then, and at the church their ways separated; but the door stood open as usual, and Mother Bunch never passed it without going in, if only for a minute, to say her prayers. She held up her finger reprovingly at Pat.

"You must be a good dog, Pat, and stay outside. Dogs have never been little children, and have never been brought to church to be christened. So you must stay outside. If you try to come in the angels will turn you out."

Pat wagged his bushy red tail and winked his loving brown eyes, as much as to say,

"Trust me, dear little Mother Bunch. I mean to be good and not try to go in."

Then Mother Bunch turned to Ikkey.

"Poor Pat has not any prayers to say, but you have, Ikkey; and GOD is listening, and we must not keep Him waiting."

The red colour flew over Ikkey's face. He would as soon have thought of disobeying the Queen as Mother Bunch. But he stammered,

"I—I—do not know what prayers to say, Miss Vera."

"Oh, Ikkey! Of course you know many more than I do, because you are so much bigger and have ever so many more things you want to say."

Ikkey did not reply, but meekly followed Mother Bunch into the church. Perhaps the restful feeling that there, away from the world, there was peace; or perhaps the thought Mother Bunch had put into his mind, that GOD was so near and listening for him to speak, brought the words from his full heart to his lips. Whichever of these it might be, or whether both, certainly Ikkey found comfort in his sorrow, for he knelt motionless at prayer, only

his lips moving, long after Mother Bunch had finished her simple devotions.

Her prayers were always short, but she prayed a great many times in the day. She was not in a hurry, and sat up in her seat, taking advantage of her waiting to give a friendly smile and understanding nod to kind S. John in his blue gown. Ever since the night he had walked out of his window and cuddled her in his arms, she had felt that quite a confidential friendship had been established between them. She had told nobody of it, but she never left the church without a friendly smile and nod as she passed his window.

There was a softened expression in Ikkey's face as they came from the church together, nor was he ashamed of the tears upon his lashes, as he held out his posy of forget-me-nots.

"Will you be so kind as to give them to Annie for me, Miss Vera? and say,"—and Ikkey swept a longing glance over the village which looked so calm and lovely in the evening light,—"that I am

powerful vexed to have to go, but that I hope, yes, I do *hope*, Miss Vera, that some day we shall see each other again."

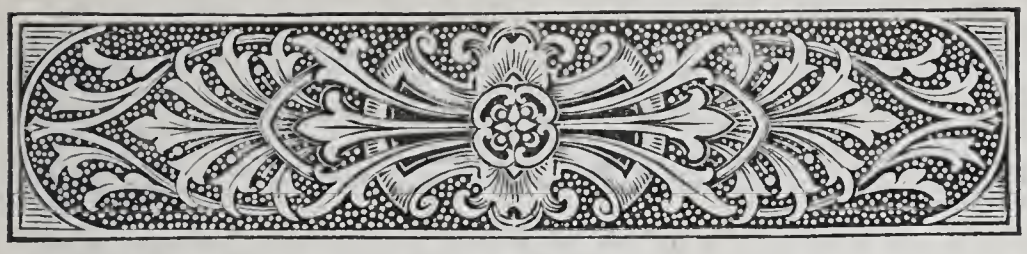
"Some day *soon*," added Mother Bunch, "and Ikkey, you will write and tell Annie where you are living, because then we shall know where to send for you when the ring is found."

"Yes, Miss Vera," said Ikkey, "I will do that. Good-bye, and thank you kindly, Miss Vera."

"Good-bye," said Mother Bunch, "and come back *soon*."

Ikkey smiled at the repetition of the word; it sounded sweet to him. And the last remembrance he carried with him of Cool-Dillay was that of Mother Bunch, with one hand upon Pat's red head, the other grasping the big posy of forget-me-nots, looking back at him with grave, quiet face while her lips seemed to say,

"*Soon*."



CHAPTER IX.

Humfray tells the Story.

PHYLLIS'S BALL OF WORSTED.

POOR Ikkey left Cool-Dillay because of the loss of that unfortunate ring: if it was not for Grandfather Sylvester I should have wished it had never been dug up. Ikkey was so silly to think that any one who knew him could believe for an instant that he had taken that ring. We told him over and over again that it must have rolled into a corner or hidden in a crack; but he knew that every crack had been well poked into and every corner examined, so he only answered,

"I don't say as how you suspects me, but other folks does."

But if Ikkey had got the idea into his stupid head that other folks suspect him, he did the very thing that set them talking. They said that *of course* he had gone to London to sell the ring. It put us out very much altogether, Ikkey's disappearance and what the people said ; we felt dreadfully down and depressed over it. Then Annie Fawn grew so pale and looked so wretched that we were as guilty criminals and sneaked out of her way if we saw her coming ; we could not help the feeling that it was our fault. Dear Grandfather Sylvester too gets worse instead of better, and the elders say that the worry of Ikkey and the ring has a great deal to do with his illness.

We none of us knew Ikkey was going until he had gone, except of course Mother Bunch. By-the-way, Isabel wishes us to get out of the habit of calling her Mother Bunch, and give her her real name "Vera," which we have almost forgotten is her name. It is very difficult, but we try to oblige Isabel, though at present Vera seems a

stranger and Mother Bunch an old friend. I do not know how it is that she is always in luck, but she is. As Phyllis says, if one doesn't want to meet a person one runs straight into their arms; while if there is anybody you particularly want to meet you may hunt for them in the likeliest places and not run them to earth at all. But Mother Bunch—I mean Vera—always has *such* luck. We should like to have seen poor Ikkey, and we might have prevailed upon him not to go. Vera did not tell us much of what he said; we wish we had met him too.

Ikkey had been gone nearly three weeks when another odd thing happened. Phyllis was knitting some coarse worsted stockings for Gay when he goes upon his bicycle. He wore out such a number of bought ones in a short time that mother said she could not afford it, and that he must not ride his bicycle unless he has the proper stockings—very coarse worsted ones knitted by Phyllis. The bore is that she is such an immense time over

them: I fancy she took it easily after she had finished the first pair, thinking those would last some while, but those were in the tub, and poor Gay hung about her, imploring her to hurry, as he wanted a ride upon his bicycle. The other afternoon we were four of us in the schoolroom, Phyllis and Sylvia reading, Ethelred and myself at preparation, when Gay bustled in. He is a regular little fidget sometimes.

"I say, Phyllis, have you finished my stockings yet?"

Ethelred, Sylvia, and I laughed,—we could not help it,—it was the one question poor Gay was constantly asking. We waited to hear Phyllis's usual answer, "I am getting on with them," when we had intended to sit upon her on Gay's behalf; but whether she suspected as much, or was nettled at our laughing, I do not know; whichever it was she put down her book and answered in a mild voice,

"I am very sorry, Gay. But there isn't much

more to do to the last one ; if you can wait, I will finish them now."

"I want them badly," sighed Gay, "but what do you call 'not much,' Phyllis ?"

"About a quarter of an hour's work, or twenty minutes," said Phyllis, bringing out the unfinished stocking and settling down.

"Twenty minutes," Gay looked longingly at the sunshine.

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," murmured Ethelred, without raising his eyes.

"I'll wait," said Gay in a decided voice.

"Very well," said Phyllis, and she commenced knitting.

There was silence for some time. We were deep in our preparation, when Gay remarked in a very brisk tone,

"As it takes you so long to knit those stockings you had better begin some more *directly*. Sylvia might do one and you the other, then they would not take so long."

"Thank you," said Sylvia. "Do you know, Phyllis," she said, shutting up her book, "that that is the very ball of worsted you were winding the morning the ring was lost."

"Yes," said Phyllis, with a sigh. "What a pity I ever asked Grandfather Sylvester to let me wear that ring. There has been nothing but trouble since."

"It was a pity too that I was taken ill upon that particular morning," said Sylvia, "if I had not been, I should not have gone into his study, and you would not have come in to ask how I was, and—"

"Do you think," interrupted Gay, who was anxiously watching the finishing of his stocking, "that you will have enough stuff, Phyllis?—the ball is getting very small, and the stocking does not look nearly finished."

"I was wondering too," said Phyllis, "and if there is not enough you will have to wait after all; for I have not another yard left, except what you see here, and you must bring some more when you come from school to-morrow."

"That will be a bother, after my trouble of waiting," said Gay, and we sympathised with him so much that we forgot our preparation, and kept our eyes fixed upon the ball of worsted slowly turning round, as it lay upon Phyllis's lap.

"*Will* there be enough?" said Gay.

"You are so impatient," said Phyllis, "wait and see."

"I have waited *months* already," argued Gay. "You can't call me impatient."

"Poor Gay," murmured Ethelred.

"Let us hope for the best," said I.

"The ball is growing *very* small," said Gay gloomily.

"I think—I really think there will be enough," said Phyllis.

Gay brightened, and whistled a cheerful tune.

"That's all right," he said.

"I am not quite sure," said Phyllis after another pause. "I am afraid—"

Gay's face lengthened, and by his anxious ex-

pression, you would have thought his life almost depended upon that tiny ball of worsted.

We watched with amusement; there was very little worsted left. "Gay will lose," said Ethelred. The worsted caught, Phyllis gave a hard pull to disentangle it, and from the middle of the tiny ball something bright and shining was jerked into her lap.

"Oh!" We four who were looking on gave a shout, and sprang upon Phyllis, nearly knocking her over. We might have been playing pounce commerce, only we do not usually make such a noise over it, as we did then. Eight hands were in her lap at once, and her knitting pins were nearly in our eyes. Ethelred was the victor; he seized it.

The wonderful it! There was such a clamour as we tried to see into his hand, which he kept shut tight, and held over his head.

"Is it?"

"It is."

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"Really?"

"Really and truly."

"How *very* odd."

"We should never have thought of looking there."

"What is it?" inquired Phyllis, who had been intent upon her stocking. "What are you making such a noise about?"

"Don't you guess?"

"Of course I don't. How can I? There is nothing in a ball of worsted to make such a fuss about."

"*Isn't there!*" said Ethelred with emphasis, and bringing his hand down from over his head, he opened it before Phyllis's astonished eyes—and there upon his palm lay the lady's ring. "No, you are *not* to touch, Phyllis; there's a fatality about you and that ring, we don't want to lose it again."

"We were all watching, and saw it roll out," said Sylvia, "but you were looking at the stocking and missed it."

"But how did it get in?" said Phyllis, who was so

bewildered that she did nothing but stare at Ethelred's hand with the ring lying upon it.

"From your finger, I suppose," said Ethelred.

"Yes, now I see," said Phyllis, "the ring was too large for my little finger, and while I was commencing the ball, I must have slipped it off with the wool and into the midst of it; because I was practising the new way of winding wool, which Cousin Constance taught me."

"And there it has lain ever since," said I.

"You see," said Gay, who is fond of being what Ethelred calls 'a little moral,' sometimes; "if you had worked harder at my stockings, the ring would have been found sooner, perhaps in time to prevent Ikkey from going away."

"We ought to take it to Grandfather Sylvester at once," said I, "how pleased he will be."

Just then mother entered, and we turned upon her.

"Is Grandfather awake?" we shouted.

"Gently," she said. "What is such a noise about?"

"Good news," said Ethelred. "We have found the ring; or rather the ring found itself, for we were not looking for it, or thinking of it."

Mother was astonished. "Why, where was it?" she said.

"In Phyllis's ball of worsted," said I.

"That *is* good news," said mother, "and if you can be tolerably quiet and steady, you may all go in to Grandfather Sylvester, and take the ring."

We were, as a rule, allowed in one at a time, and only once a day, as he was not strong enough to bear much—except Vera, who went in and out as she pleased. She was there when we carried in the ring in triumph, sitting upon a stool at Grandfather's feet, as still as a mouse.

We astonished Grandfather Sylvester by appearing in a body; more when we showed him what we had found. He was delighted, and we did not seem to tire him as we stood around his chair and told him about it. Gay amused us and Grandfather, I am sure, by the feeling way in which he

described his unfinished stocking. Vera only spoke once, and then it was to say,

"Now Ikkey can come home."

"Yes," Grandfather Sylvester said, "Ikkey must be our first thought."

When we went away, mother wrote a note from Grandfather's dictation, to Ikkey, and we ourselves took it to Annie for the address. She was sitting working at the window, pale as any ghost, but we sang out that we had good news, and she ran to the door to meet us. The colour came to her cheeks as she fetched Ikkey's letter, dated a week back; Ethelred copied the address, and we posted the letter, not trusting it even to Annie, taking care to spread the news that Ikkey, if anybody had doubted him, was perfectly innocent. It flew like magic, and those who *had* doubted him were now very sorry.

There was a load off our minds, until several days passed, and no answer to the letter came. The only answer we imagined was Ikkey himself, com-

ing back by the first train to Cool-Dillay. Grandfather Sylvester thought he might have spent all his money, and he wrote to Mr. Pippo and asked him if he would kindly go to the address given, and supply him with what was necessary. Mr. Pippo appeared, bearing mother's letter unopened. Ikkey had left for Brighton the day before it arrived. He could get no work in London of any sort, and he had gone to see if he would be more fortunate at Brighton. He had paid what he owed his landlady, but had left no message, nor said anything about expecting a letter, or where they were to be sent if any came.

We seemed pretty much as we were before the ring was found, as far as Ikkey was concerned. Grandfather Sylvester is so kind-hearted, that he vexes sadly over it. The doctor said that he must not be at Cool-Dillay in November, but that he must go for a month, or six weeks, or two months, if he can, to Brighton. Some of us are to go with him, not all. There are such a number of us, that

he could not afford to take every one of us. Phyllis and Sylvia are going on a visit; Cousin Constance, Isabel and Gordon remain at Cool-Dillay, while mother, Ethelred, Gay, the twins, Vera, and myself, accompany Grandfather Sylvester. Bill and Nan have flagged lately, a most unusual thing for them, and it is thought the change may be good for them.

We have none of us seen the sea, and should be almost *too* happy; if it were not for those starving people we have upon our minds, Mr. Pippo and Ikkey. Ikkey we can only imagine, Mr. Pippo we *saw*, when he came down with the neglected letter, and we kept him for a few days; he looked miserably thin and ill. He is working hard, and I do not believe he gets enough to eat. We are quite depressed over him. Then there is Ikkey. But we are going to Brighton, and if he is there, we mean to find him, if we spend our days in searching it from end to end.

Roberts has just got the situation at Lord Latti-

mer's for which he has been so long waiting; and there is ours ready for Ikkey, and no Ikkey to step into it! How badly things have arranged themselves. *If* the ring had been found two days sooner! We are inclined to take Gay's part more than ever, and think Phyllis need not have been so lazy over those stockings.

Bill and Nan know no trouble. They are so delighted and excited, that we can't imagine what we shall do with them. They were very anxious to take Pat, but met with such a decided "*No*," that even they did not venture to ask a second time.

CHAPTER X.

Humfray tells the Story.

GAY DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF; THE TWINS DO NOT.

IT was nearly the end of October when we moved to Brighton. The weather was very mild, and we were able, late though it was, to get sea-bathing. When it grew too cold and nasty for the sea we went to the swimming-baths, which we did not like so well.

We had not been long at Brighton before Gay distinguished himself, and made us very proud of him, though we did not tell him so, for Grandfather Sylvester is always afraid lest we shall grow

up proud and conceited. He says that pride is the most subtle fault there is, because it has so many different ways of showing itself, and is even by some people accounted a virtue. He told us the story of the young man who asked what was the first step towards Heaven, and was told it was humility. The second? humility. The third? humility still, showing how hard it is to attain,—that pride is our first sin, and will, as being the one most difficult to conquer, be the last to leave us.

One morning Ethelred and I were too lazy to go down to bathe in the sea, and Bill does not care about it; he never cares for anything in which his twin cannot join, therefore Gay went alone. He takes to the water like a duck, and swims fairly well. That morning he had swum some distance and was turning round when he heard a cry for help and saw a fellow, evidently seized with cramp, struggling in the water. Gay resembles Mother Bunch in generally keeping a cool head, and he

swam to the spot where the fellow had sunk, and waited for him to come to the surface. Gay said he had read in books that the best way of saving a drowning person is to seize hold of their hair; he had also read that there is great danger of a drowning man losing his wits and hanging on to the one who tries to save him, until he very often drags him down and both are drowned together.

"I didn't want to be drowned," said Gay, in his funny, high-pitched voice, and dictatorial manner, "so I sang out when the fellow came uppermost, 'Listen, you fellow. If you hang on to me I'll knock you off and leave you to drown; but if you do as I tell you, I'll do my best to save you.' Then I made a grab at his hair, but I suppose the book must have meant a lady's hair, for there was nothing of his to hold on by, it was cropped close; so I slipped my hand into his jersey, where the collar would have been, and swam with him to shore. He was nearly choked, but when he had spit out the water he had swallowed, he told me his

name was Brown, and that he was staying at the Bedford ; then he asked my name, and where I was living, and said ' Thank you,' and shook hands, and then we both went home, and that was all."

Brown, father and son, called upon us to express their warmest gratitude. Gay was out, but Grandfather Sylvester, Ethelred, and I were sitting together when they came, and Brown junior gave a fuller account than Gay's. He said he was desperate, and should certainly have clung to Gay, if he had not made his heart quake when he heard him speak. He said Gay spoke as if he really meant what he said, and Brown felt he would keep his word. He could not see, and he thought by the tone and manner that it was a grown-up person who was coming to his assistance. He is much older and bigger than Gay, and he said, with tears in his eyes, that he never should forget Gay's struggles as he swam to land. Two or three times big waves nearly overmastered him, but he held out gallantly, never once loosing his grip

upon Brown's jersey. We were real proud of Gay when we heard *that.* We knew then that the two would have come to shore or—neither. Gay has certainly scored *one.*

I suppose the exertion was too much for his strength, for he was ailing for several days afterwards, and it was an excuse for us to pet him and make much of him. He did not complain of any particular pain, but he was always tired; could not eat, and seemed altogether out of sorts. He was not himself for nearly a fortnight.

We wonder whether in the midst of battling with the waves he found voice to chant his favourite lines,

> "My strength is as the strength of ten,
> Because my heart is pure."

We did not venture to ask him, for since we teased him for always accompanying himself in his bath to it, he has been very touchy upon the subject. But Ethelred cautiously sounded Brown; did not say *what,* but only that Gay had a habit of

chanting, and Brown said he heard something at first, but was too anxious to listen, and as the journey grew more difficult the sound ceased, for Gay wanted every breath and all his strength to land Brown and himself in safety. So we were satisfied. We are so thankful he came safely out of it. There are a good many of us, but oh! we should have missed dear Gay. A vacant place is a vacant place, be the circle small or large, and can never be filled again; the blank is always there.

There is a great deal to be done in Brighton, and Grandfather Sylvester says we are to do what we like, according to our different tastes. Bill and Nan have taken to riding donkeys, which is, as we all said, exactly what you would have expected of them. Ethelred, Gay, and myself have devoted ourselves to boating; and part of each day we give up to searching after Ikkey.

We have made friends with a nice boatman named Dann, in whose boats we go out. We have asked

him, as he is so much upon the beach and elsewhere, if he will always be upon the look-out for Ikkey. Dann said he would if we would describe him, and Ethelred began,—

"Dark hair, nearly black—"

"Rather curly at the ends," I said.

"It's too short to have much curl in it," put in Gay.

"Dark eyes," continued Ethelred, "complexion burnt a deep brown—"

"He may have grown whiter since he left," said Gay, "Annie is."

"Good teeth," went on Ethelred, "and nose,—by the way, what sort of a *nose* has he?"

"Oh, like everybody else's,—straight, you know," said Gay, who hasn't a notion of features, and would, I believe, describe everybody thus,—"Two eyes, one nose, a pair of lips, and a head of hair."

"I don't think I ever noticed his nose," I said.

"Nor I," said Ethelred. "Well then, middling

height, neither tall nor short,—and there you are, Dann!"

"Let me get them well in my head, sir," said Dann, checking off the items upon his fingers and thumb, "dark hair, dark eyes, dark brown skin, nose of no account, and middling height. Nothing particular about him that you sight him in a minute, is there, sir?"

"No," replied Ethelred,—then we looked hopelessly at each other.

They say there are no two people alike in the world, unless it may be here and there twins, yet if you have to describe a person, how difficult it is to do it. There is Ikkey now: as Dann said, he might come across twenty fellows answering to the description Ethelred gave, and yet not one of the twenty be Ikkey.

We seem no nearer finding him than when first we came. Grandfather Sylvester would be better, only we can all see how dreadfully this is worrying him. Isabel wrote the other day and said that

Annie had had no letter but the one Ikkey had written soon after he reached London. She did not say how Annie was, but that I am sure was to save Grandfather Sylvester the pain of hearing about her.

A few evenings ago we had some hope put into us. Dann came up to say he had seen "a young chap selling flowers," who answered to the description of Ikkey. Dann entered into conversation with him, and, though he was very guarded in his answers, he managed to find out that he had not been long in Brighton, that his trade was that of a gardener, and that he had lived all his life in the country.

We young ones jumped at once to the conclusion that of course it *was* Ikkey, and we asked Dann why he had let him slip; but Dann said he "couldn't, without giving a reason, ask him to step up to us, that the young chap seemed shy, and he was afeard of frightening him; and then descriptions ain't to be trusted, and ten to one it

wasn't the young chap we wanted. Besides, if he was selling flowers one day he'd be sure to be selling them another, and then we could see for ourselves. If it was Ikkey, it would be all proper, and if it wasn't, no bones would be broken."

Grandfather Sylvester said that Dann was quite right to be cautious, and he warned us against raising our hopes too high. There might be several young men with dark hair and eyes who came from the country, whose trade was that of a gardener, and who had not been long in Brighton. But I really believe that he himself counted somewhat upon it, and as for us younger ones, we went to bed feeling sure that the next day would find Ikkey safely housed under our roof.

Though it was November, it was mild and balmy when we awoke, and when the sun got up it was lovely. We had intended to go boating, but instead of that we walked Brighton from one end to the other, noting every man who carried flowers. In spite of our sacrifice we were disap-

pointed, for at the end of the day we were no nearer finding Ikkey than at the commencement.

We went to Dann, he had been looking out also, and he said he had not seen again the same young man he told us of yesterday.

We are more than ever sure it was Ikkey, and we hope he has not left Brighton and gone to another place.

We have come to the conclusion that Bill and Nan must not be taken into counsel. They are such terrible blunderers, and they got themselves and us into a really bad scrape while we were walking in search of Ikkey. Grandfather Sylvester says he wishes they would bear in mind that,

> "Evil is wrought by want of thought,
> More than by want of heart."

I do not know whether I have quoted this correctly; I believe it is as Grandfather Sylvester said it. We have lodgings in the King's Road, just opposite the part of the beach where the don-

keys are, at the entrance of Hove; and Bill and Nan are allowed to go and come back so far alone, —further, we dare not trust them. Yesterday afternoon they went down, being so fine, for a donkey ride. Upon their return, it was growing dusk, and a man turned swiftly round the corner near where we live, and went from the King's Road up the street. Bill and Nan caught sight of a dark head, a ragged coat, a brown hand, holding a basket partly filled with flowers, and jumping at once to a conclusion they called out, "Stop, Ikkey." A group of idle boys misunderstanding them, either by mistake or on purpose, took up the cry and shouted "Stop thief." The man started off running, Bill and Nan after him, and the boys after them. "Stop, Ikkey," they kept on crying, and "Stop thief," called out the boys; and soon a whole crowd collected, racing up streets and down streets and round corners and across squares just where the man led them, and shouting "Stop thief, stop thief," as loud as they could.

Bill and Nan declared, when asked about it, that they had made up their minds, directly the man set off running, that he must be Ikkey ; that they had paid no attention to the words the crowd said, but concluded that they were saying " Stop, Ikkey" like themselves. The man led them a chase until he was brought to bay by a tall policeman who appeared from somewhere. Then he turned ; Bill and Nan saw he was not Ikkey, nor bore any resemblance to him ; and, fearing they should be scolded for being late, they slipped quietly through the crowd and made their way home ; leaving the people, the man, and policeman, to settle affairs as best they could.

They did not tell us anything of this, being ashamed, I suppose, and no doubt in the " happy-go-lucky" nature which they possess, thought they should hear no more about it. They were mistaken. They will hear a great deal more about it.

This morning Gay, Ethelred, and myself were going out with Grandfather Sylvester, and we were

in the dining-room upon the point of starting, when the superintendent of the police was shown in. He produced a note-book and pencil, and asked what charge of theft was brought by the young gentleman and lady against the man, Albert Saunders, whom they had chased the previous evening, and who had been taken in charge and locked up for the night. I suppose the boys, there are often a group, lounging near the corner a few yards from our house, knew Bill and Nan by sight, and had given the address, and told where they lived.

Grandfather Sylvester knew nothing, nor did we, but we fetched Bill and Nan, and I really believe, if it only lasts, that they have had a fright. Grandfather Sylvester was stern and examined them himself; they grew red, hung their heads, stood first upon one leg then upon the other, after the manner of fowls, and muttered so low we could hardly hear what they said.

After they had left the room, Grandfather Syl-

vester spoke to the superintendent of the police, who said the man should be released, but Grandfather said he must have some recompense for being locked up upon unjust suspicion. The superintendent shrugged his shoulders and said there was no need of that, the man was a vagrant fellow, well known to the police, and he had no doubt he had done many things for which he deserved to be locked up. We were very glad Grandfather Sylvester was firm and said that justice was justice, and he certainly should do what he intended. Then the superintendent left, promising to send Albert Saunders. He kept his word, and Grandfather gave him ten shillings.

Bill and Nan had a lecture from Grandfather Sylvester which really alarmed them. He pointed out that an innocent person had been unjustly suspected and locked up for a whole night, because of their blundering and carelessness, and that if they did not try to improve, worse than that might happen. He talked a great deal to them, and they

have been quite subdued ever since. I do not think they will be so careless for the future; Ethelred says, "Not until they forget again." At any rate we shall keep this as a rod in pickle, and hold it over them.

It was lucky they did not see Albert Saunders, or their remorse and penitence would have vanished; he was so very delighted with the ten shillings that we did not believe he would object to being locked up every night—with the same result. We had not much opinion of him after that; we thought he ought to have valued his character more than money.

How difficult it is to find people when once you lose them; as difficult, Ethelred says, as looking for a needle in a bundle of hay. More so, I say, for if you hunt through the hay carefully the needle, if it be there, would prick your finger and you would find it. But hunt through Brighton however carefully we may, there is no pricking of the finger to show that Ikkey is near. Grandfather

Sylvester, I am sure, is growing despondent, though he will not own to it, but keeps repeating the motto of the fatal ring—

"*The day will come.*"

CHAPTER XI.

Humfray tells the Story.

GAY HAS SOMETHING ON HIS MIND.

ONE afternoon Ethelred and I came in early; the truth was it was a most unpleasant day, for there was a strong east wind which made us shiver even though we had buttoned our great coats tightly over us. I don't know why an east wind more than another wind should pierce through any amount of clothing, and cut your bones in two, but that is just what it does; other cold you can wrap up against; an east wind finds out your nerves, and makes you feel, as our cook says, "all-overish."

Ethelred and I agreed that there is no proverb so true as the one which declares that—

> " When the wind is in the east
> It's neither good for man nor beast."

We had made ourselves tidy for the evening, and were on our way down stairs to sit with Grandfather Sylvester and amuse him, for he had not been out all day—indeed it was not the weather for any invalid to venture outside the door—and we were still feeling skinned and rasping in mind and body, which is the effect a downright easter always produces in us ; when, as we passed Gay's room, we heard no end of a noise. We stopped to listen. There was a splashing and dashing of water, as if a dozen young whales were having a game of play, and over and above that we heard a shrill chanting, Gay's voice pitched to its highest key—

> " My strength is as the strength of ten,
> Because my heart is pure."

I do not fancy I have ever mentioned another of

Gay's oddities, which is that when he is vexed, or has anything on his mind, he goes straight to his room and has a bath. Mother at one time wanted to put a stop to it by forbidding it, but Grandfather Sylvester said, No; perhaps the cold water did him good morally as well as physically—that the exertion and bracing effect worked matters off his mind and made him feel happier and better. If the result was good it was better not to interfere with the means; so long as there was nothing wrong about them. And I must say we have noticed that Gay always appears more cheerful and contented after his tubbing—if anything has gone crooked that has obliged him to have one—so we conclude the strange idea succeeds with him.

"I wonder what is the matter now," said I, as we stood in the passage and listened to the splashing of water and the sound of Gay's voice. "I hope nothing *worse* has happened since we went out."

For, what with our troubles, and the depression

of not finding Ikkey, and Grandfather Sylvester still keeping so unwell, I had grown desponding, and there was always the feeling in my mind that something worse was to follow.

"Perhaps it is only the east wind," said Ethelred, who was still smarting from it.

"Nonsense,—Gay wouldn't have a bath for *that*, though it does make one feel savage as an old bear that has had no supper. I am afraid there may be worse news about Ikkey, or perhaps Annie has pined herself into her grave; she *has* been ill; or Mr. Pippo been found dead in his bed from starvation, or—"

"I say, Humfray, shut up at once," growled Ethelred; "you are worse than all the horrors of a newspaper. I'll ask Gay in order that your mind may be set at rest."

"And your own," I added, for I saw he was just as anxious though he would not own it. "I would rather you would ask Gay than I though. You will most likely get in for it."

"Never mind, if we find out what is the matter," said Ethelred boldly.

Gay hates being interrupted in his bath, and he more strongly even hates being questioned when he is in one of these moods. And we are all afraid of Gay and respected his fancies; even Ethelred and myself, though we are several years older.

Ethelred opened the door gently, just wide enough to advance his right leg, and a small portion of body and face.

"Gay," he said, in a mild voice.

No answer; Gay had not heard.

"Gay!" in a much louder key.

"What do you want?" shouted Gay. "Get out, will you?"

"Have you anything on your mind?" asked Ethelred, boldly venturing more of himself into the room, but keeping hold of the door-handle.

"Yes," shouted Gay with a violent splash that sent drops of water to every part of the room,

"My strength is as the strength of ten.

Get out, will you?"

"What is it?" asked Ethelred, anxiously. "Do tell us."

"Because my heart is pure,"

screamed Gay. "*Will* you get out?"

Ethelred did not go, but had opened his mouth to speak again, when Gay's large bath sponge, full of water, was thrown with such good aim, that it hit him exactly on the nose. He shut the door very quickly after that, you may be sure, and we could not help laughing as we stood in the passage outside the closed door. Gay always chooses the very largest bath sponge he can buy, and the water from it filled Ethelred's mouth and ran down in streams upon his clean shirt.

"I shall have to change," he said. "I won't be a minute. Wait for me, Humfray."

I sat upon the stairs to wait, and listened to

Gay's splashing and wild chanting, which seemed to be prolonged indefinitely.

Grandfather Sylvester we found was alone, for mother, having a bad headache, had gone to lie down. He had had his afternoon nap, and seemed so glad of our company that we mentally said, 'Thank you,' to the east wind for sending us in at such an unusually early hour.

We told him about Gay and the sponge, at which he was much amused, and he was able to relieve our minds as to the reason why Gay had had a bath. It was no fresh trouble concerning us all, but a worry of Gay's alone. He had been for a stroll that afternoon, and had met a poor woman who had told him such a heart-rending story of misery and distress, that Gay was driven home in a state of deep dejection. He had come straight to Grandfather Sylvester, told him about it, and said he had given the woman leave to come to the house in an hour's time, and he begged Grandfather Sylvester to hear her story, and if he

thought it was true, to let him give her the money he had saved to buy himself a new cricket-bat. Ethelred and I both know how badly Gay wants a new bat, for his old one has been in hospital several times, and can't hold out another season's play.

Grandfather Sylvester saw the woman when she came, and approved of Gay's plan, but he only allowed Gay to give her sufficient money to keep her in the necessaries of life for a certain time, but told her to come again in a couple of days, and then he sat down and wrote to a gentleman who spends a great deal of time working amongst the poor, and gave him her name and address, and asked him to find out the best way of putting her into a position of earning sufficient for the support of herself and children. There the matter ended for the present.

Then Grandfather Sylvester and Gay had a talk, and Gay explained that he was so unhappy because he could not understand why some people

should have everything they wanted to make them happy, while others had little or nothing. Why, for instance, we should be so comfortable at the House, where we had all we could reasonably require, and others, like this poor woman, should be so miserable. Grandfather Sylvester told him it was a thought which had puzzled older heads and worried older hearts than Gay's, and we could only be thankful for our own mercies, and not rest content until we had done whatever lay in our power to help those who needed our help, whether by giving our sympathy, our time, or our money, or all three as we could, and as they were needed. He repeated to us what he had said to Gay, that if in the years to come we were ever to grow rich, we should never live in luxury, but keeping only "enough" for ourselves, give away the remainder. He pointed out that the beautiful cathedrals in the olden days would never have been built if people had not thought first of GOD, next of others, last of themselves. And he said he

should like to keep that spirit alive in us in this nineteenth century and very different time. He told us that after he had finished what he had to say, Gay sat for a while looking into the fire and not speaking. Then he said suddenly,

"Grandfather Sylvester."

And Grandfather Sylvester said,

"Yes, my boy."

"I am afraid that if any one knows I have given away the money I had saved for a bat, they will buy me one for a Christmas present."

Grandfather Sylvester told us he felt very guilty when Gay said that, for it was just what he really was thinking of doing. Then Gay continued,

"I want you to know that I would much rather not have that bat given to me. Will you promise, please?"

Gay was so earnest, that Grandfather Sylvester could only say,

"Yes, I promise. As Gordon would say, 'I promise sure.'"

Then Gay went off and had his bath.

Mother told me afterwards, when I was speaking to her upon the subject, that Grandfather Sylvester not only preaches, but practises. She said that he really is quite a rich man, and that he could, if he chose, keep a carriage and pair, and horses for riding, and a house in town, which would a few years ago have been a great pleasure to him, as he is so fond of clever people, and the congenial society which he would have gathered around him there. Instead of which, he lives content the whole year round in the one House in Cool-Dillay, which is his own, and for which he pays no rent, and his only "equipage" is a trap which fetches luggage from the Station, drawn by an old horse that has seen its best days. Mother says that he gives nearly half his income away, and then much of the remainder is spent upon us, leaving a mere nothing for himself. And we have lived with him all these years and never found this out! We realised the truth of the remark Gay made when

we told him, which was, that "Grandfather Sylvester was a rich man who would get into Heaven."

We never let Grandfather Sylvester find out that we knew this,—mother said it would only vex him. But I hope we shall grow up the better for the knowledge of it. When *one* person does a very grand thing, it makes much more impression upon you than if fifty or a hundred people *talk* of doing it.

Gay came down to tea that evening looking as if he had never had anything on his mind. He was only so very elated at having taken such good aim with his sponge at Ethelred's nose. Ethelred's thoughts were elsewhere, however, and no amount of "crowing" upon the part of Gay could get a rise out of him.

Gay's poor woman was soon happily settled. The gentleman to whom Grandfather Sylvester applied, found she came from a little village not far from Brighton, and that she was longing to

return there, but had not the means. Grandfather Sylvester bought a tiny cottage with a piece of garden stocked with vegetables at the back of it; and he got her sewing-machine out of pawn, and she said that with it she could earn plenty, and be only too happy and content.

We went over to see her before we left Brighton, at least, mother, Gay, Ethelred, and myself, and we found her so cheerful and grateful, and the puny children daily growing stronger. But that was later on, only I have put it down now to end the account of Gay's poor woman.

When we returned from Cuckfield, Grandfather Sylvester asked Gay if he felt more contented, and Gay said,

"But that is only *one,* Grandfather Sylvester, and there are such numbers."

And Grandfather Sylvester answered,

"We can but do our best,—having done that, we must leave the rest in the hands of GOD. When you grow up, Gay, I hope, GOD willing,

you may do great things. Now you must be content to—

'Do the work that's nearest,
Though it's dull at whiles;
Helping, when you meet them,
Lame dogs over stiles.'

The poor woman was *your* 'lame dog,' Gay. But for your having had compassion upon her first, I should never have taken an interest in her. Be satisfied with her for a beginning."

"It takes a long while to grow up," said Gay, shaking his head.

Then he went off and had a bath,—after which he was more cheerful.

CHAPTER XII.

Humfray tells the Story.

BILL AND NAN'S INDEPENDENCE.

WE could not make out what had happened to Bill and Nan. For a few days they were so very—obliging—I was going to write, but Ethelred says *cringing*. By whichever name I call it, they have been most unlike their two usual selves. I thought it was that the affair of the policeman had sobered them, and that they had turned over a new leaf. Ethelred says I know nothing about it and that we must wait and see.

They were so anxious to please and always on the look-out for any opportunity of running er-

rands, fetching things we require from upstairs, or going upon messages. Unfortunately, as Ethelred and I remark, these attentions are so new to them that they blunder over them, and are more worry than help. In jumping up to get Grandfather Sylvester a book he was asking for, they upset a little table upon which stood a vase of flowers; the vase was broken, the water sent over the carpet. Mother wanted her knitting from her bed-room, Nan let the ball roll out of her hands, the wool caught in the banisters, the thread broke. Grandfather Sylvester left his spectacles in the dining-room; Bill *would* rush after them, and, in his hurry, caught his foot in a mat, fell full length upon the floor, and both glasses were smashed.

After those and sundry other accidents, we told Bill and Nan that we were very much obliged for their good intentions, but we thought they had better give up the idea of being attentive, it did not suit them. Grandfather Sylvester thought we were hard upon them, but his eyes and all our eyes

—Ethelred said his had never been shut—were opened a few days later.

For an entire morning, much to our astonishment, they were locked in their rooms writing letters. They trusted no one, but posted the letters with their own hands at the nearest pillar-box.

That same evening we were lingering over our tea and a silence had fallen upon us, for our thoughts and words had been of Ikkey, the chances, alas! of finding him seeming fewer every day. The silence was broken by Nan, who cleared her throat noisily, put her head on one side, and said, insinuatingly,

"Grandfather Sylvester?"

Ethelred, Gay, and myself sat up, on the alert at once. Now would be explained the mystery of their attentions. I am sure Grandfather Sylvester had his suspicions also, for his eyes twinkled as he glanced at us, but he only stroked his moustache and answered very quietly,

"Well, Nan, what is it?"

Nan plaited the tablecloth and gave Bill a nudge, but he said in a whisper, meant to be heard only by her, but perfectly audible all round the table,

"You said you would start it, you know."

And Nan in another whisper, equally well heard,

"But I *have* begun."

Bill's look implied such contempt of the "beginning" that Nan was urged to start afresh,—rather *shakily* this time.

"Grandfather Sylvester?"

And Grandfather Sylvester in exactly the same voice and words as before, answered,

"Well, Nan, what is it?"

Nan made a desperate plunge.

"Next Saturday is our birthday."

"How quickly time goes," said Grandfather Sylvester. "It seems only the other day you had a birthday."

"But it really is our birthday," said Bill, anxi-

ously. "We are not humbugging you, Grandfather Sylvester."

"You mean you are not telling an untruth," said Grandfather Sylvester gravely. "I hope not indeed. I was only thinking how much I wish that with additional years came also additional wisdom. I fear you are quite as thoughtless as you were a year ago."

They hung their heads. There was another long silence, then Grandfather Sylvester said,

"And now, what is it you want? For I suppose this is to lead to something."

They revived at once. It takes such a little to set them up.

"Upon our birthday," said Bill, "we always get birthday presents."

"I beg to state," said Ethelred, "that what happens one year is not in the least likely to happen another. I for one had totally forgotten you had a birthday at all."

"So had I," I said.

"We should not have allowed you to forget, we should have reminded you," said Nan.

"That I do not doubt," said Ethelred. "You will lose nothing for the want of asking for it. You have reminded us now,—that is sufficient."

"Yes," answered Bill, "but we were going to ask you not to give us any birthday presents *this* time."

"Oh," said Ethelred. "I am only too happy to fall into that view of the matter. You have risen numberless degrees in my good opinion. I never thought—"

"Oh," interrupted Nan, eagerly, "but we want the money instead of the presents."

We did not think that even their assurance could be equal to this.

"You do not mind, do you, Grandfather Sylvester?" asked Bill.

"I am afraid," said Grandfather Sylvester, "that I could not give you the money. I would do so

readily if I could trust you sufficiently to be sure that it would be properly spent."

"It is a secret, Grandfather Sylvester," said Nan, "something we have wanted for a long time. We have written to mother to tell her."

"If your mother approves of your plan then I will give money. But only upon that condition," answered Grandfather Sylvester.

The letter from Cousin Constance arrived next morning. They showed it all round, and I wonder they did, for it was a very grave letter, and spoke much of the disappointment they had been to her in the year past and her earnest hope that they would leave their thoughtless ways behind them and do better for the future. She said they caused her much anxious prayer, and she begged them to pray the more earnestly themselves that GOD would help them to conquer their faults. She sent them half-a-crown, and said it would have been double, but she did not feel they deserved it. She said nothing about their choice of a present, but

we concluded from her silence that she did not disapprove, or she would have expressed her disapproval in words.

They had a grave talking-to from Grandfather Sylvester also, and his present was five shillings. Again only half of what they would have had if they had been more steady.

Ethelred gave one shilling, so did I. We told them we could not forget the sheep dinners, and we gave our donation very unwillingly. The same remark was made by Phyllis and Sylvia, to whom they had written, and who each sent sixpence; Isabel sent them two shillings, and mother gave them two shillings; Gordon sent two penny stamps; Gay said he didn't go in for birthday presents, and had not any money,—we knew the reason why,—but that they were welcome to whatever they could find in his pockets. These upon being turned out were found to produce a lucky threepenny bit, one penny, two farthings, and an old coin. The coin they returned to him, the rest they kept.

Vera gave them sixpence, which was all her money-box contained, for she is a generous little soul, but she gave it with her whole heart, and put both her arms round their necks and loved them so sweetly that Nan's eyes were filled with tears, and Bill was heard to complain in a very gruff voice that he had taken too much pepper at dinner. I believe if there is any person in the world for whom the twins care, except themselves, that person is Mother Bunch.

We remembered to give Bill and Nan our best wishes upon their birthday, but the wonderful present they were going to make themselves quite went out of our head. We were a smaller party than usual for tea, for mother had gone to spend the evening with a friend, and Gay was dining with Brown senior and junior at the Bedford, for they were still here. We had not much of a birthday cake either, for it was only one of those stupid Madeira cakes from a confectioner's. Being in lodgings we could not have a real nice home-made cake with a

sugar top, and I suppose mother had forgotten that we none of us care for Madeira.

Grandfather Sylvester said grace, and we had just sat down, when there came a succession of rings at the bell, one peal after another.

"What a number of parcels seem to be arriving," said Grandfather Sylvester.

Here Frederick opened the door, and we looked at him in amazement, for his face was creased until hardly any features were visible, and he disappeared and appeared again, still holding the door, but seemingly unable, from some cause or other, to speak.

Bill pulled up his shirt-collar, and looked the picture of independence as he said with a consequential air, which made Ethelred afterwards declare he should like to have whipped him,

"It is all right, Grandfather Sylvester, I expect it is something Nan and I ordered. Tell the man to wait, Frederick. We will speak to him after tea."

Just then a perfect Babel of voices arose from the hall.

"Mew, mew."

"Bow-wow-wow."

Then a violent coughing; then a peal of laughter; then a sneezing as if some one had a dreadful cold. Then a voice of entreaty,

"Do give a bit to poor Polly."

Then a scolding voice,

"Oh you rascal!"

Then a whistling; then the cracking as of a pistol going off, then a noise as of an engine letting off steam. Then,

"Pretty Polly."

"Good night, Polly."

"What's the time o' day?" very gruffly like a man.

Then, "Cock-a-doodle-do."

Then, "Oh, you beast," and so on.

We sat perfectly amazed; Bill and Nan in a high state of glee; Frederick still appearing and disappearing.

"You had better shut the door, Frederick," said Grandfather Sylvester, who evidently suspected the state of the case, "and tell the man to sit down and wait as Master William directed."

"What a beauty it is," said Nan, "and what a great many things it has learned to say."

"Yes," said Bill, "I thought we were setting the right way to work."

"Please, sir?"

"Well, Frederick, what is it?" asked Grandfather Sylvester. "You have had your orders."

"*Which* man am I to tell to wait, sir?"

"How many are there?" inquired Grandfather Sylvester quietly.

"Nine, sir. And each of them has got a parrot."

"Then the nine had better wait until Master William can attend to them."

We could not help laughing to see how limp Bill and Nan became at once. All the starchness went out of Bill as he said hopelessly, "We only ordered *one*, Grandfather Sylvester, not nine."

Upon being questioned it seemed that they had set their hearts upon a talking parrot, and their friend the donkey-boy said that a "chum" of his had the very bird to suit them. Upon being cross-examined—which is always necessary with the twins if you really want to get to the bottom of a matter—they confessed they *might* have mentioned it to one or two sailors on the beach.

Grandfather Sylvester said nothing but "Oh." We saw he meant to give Bill and Nan a lesson. We never do anything without consulting Grandfather Sylvester, and it is a joke against Sylvia that she asked his opinion once, very anxiously, as to whether he would rather Phyllis and herself had cream or pale pink for their best summer dresses. Grandfather, much amused, said that a lady's dress was a subject upon which he could not possibly venture to give an opinion, but he was sure he should like best the colour that they chose themselves.

Sylvia said, "We rather prefer the cream."

And Grandfather Sylvester answered,

"Then cream, by all means, let it be," and Sylvia went away satisfied.

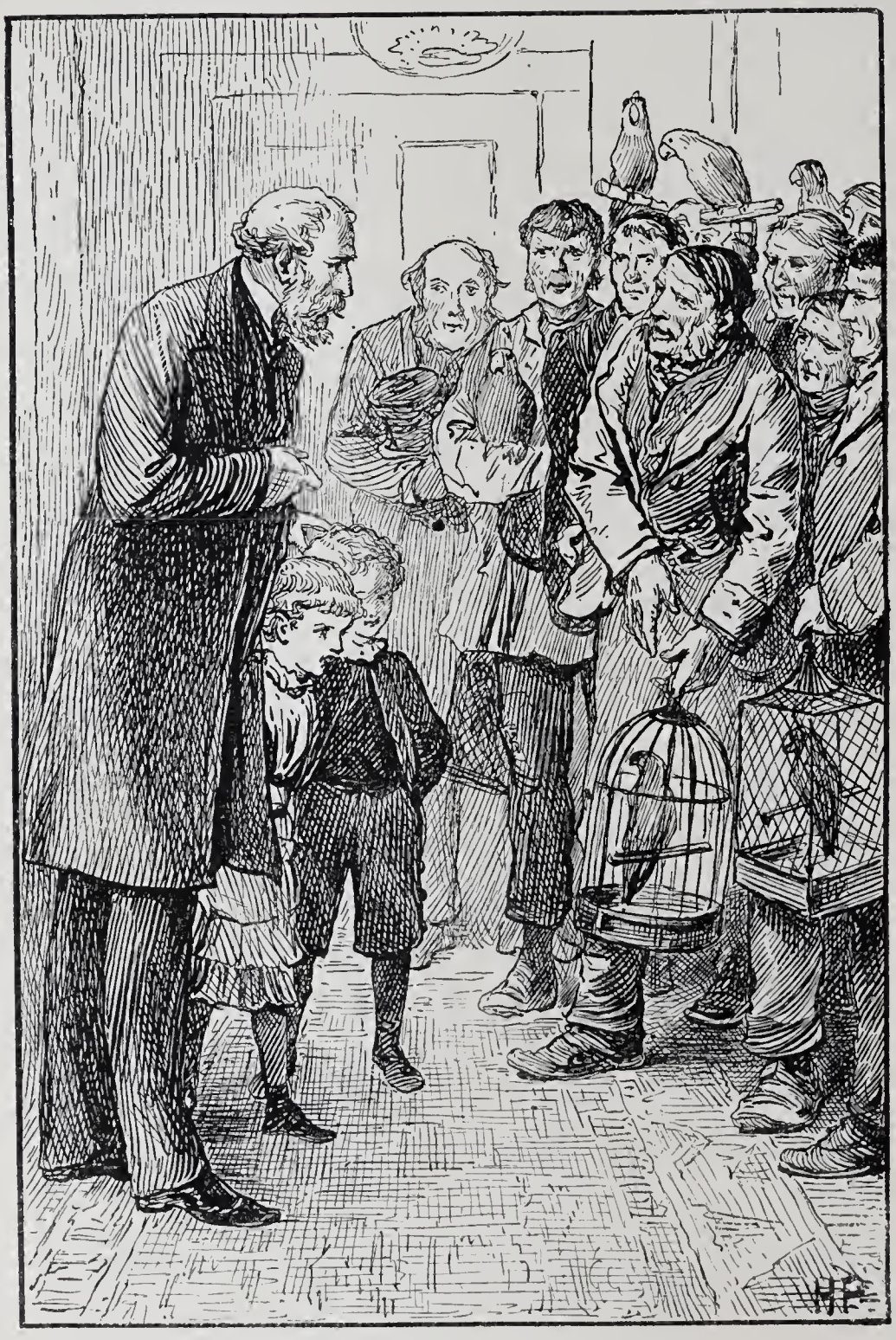
So Bill and Nan's independence disgusted us, and we hoped they were going to have a lesson. They speedily recovered themselves now, however, and Bill said grandly,

"After all, it is a very good thing there are nine parrots,—we shall be able to choose the one we like best."

Grandfather Sylvester said,

"You certainly will have the advantage of choice," and his eyes twinkled as he glanced at Ethelred and me.

The noise in the hall was deafening, and we begged Bill and Nan to hurry over their tea, and send some of the men away. They were taking matters easily, not quite being able to agree as to which bird they should choose: Bill inclining to the one that said, "Oh you rascal!" Nan to the one that sneezed.



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They were undecided as they went out of the room. We listened eagerly. Bill at first very lordly; then more mild; then the men's voices extolling their parrots in persuasive tones; then waxing insolent, declaring they were not going to be brought all that way for nothing, and so on.

After a while the door opened, and a very flushed Nan appeared, who, with the meekest of manners, and in a voice we never heard from her before, begged Grandfather Sylvester to "Please come and help Bill."

The very sight of Grandfather Sylvester stopped the men's voices at once, and his task of sending them away was a very easy one. He inquired how much Bill and Nan had to spend. The whole of their contributions had not made up quite one pound, and all the talking parrots were from £10 to £20. These were at once dismissed, and when our curiosity led us into the hall, we found there was but one parrot that could be purchased with the money the twins had,—and this

was a most dejected-looking bird, with only half a tail.

"Can he talk?" Nan inquired.

"He only wants larnin'," said the man, "and then he'll talk beautiful."

The money was paid, the parrot bought, and with it a lesson which Bill and Nan will really remember. They were quite grateful to Grandfather Sylvester for his help, and Bill muttered something about always asking his advice in the future. It was a great deal for Bill to say.

The parrot sits upon his perch, and seems very miserable. Bill and Nan already bitterly regret the money wasted upon it, for we do not think it will ever utter a word. I believe they talk of giving it to Mother Bunch, who makes much of it because it is "so unhappy." It takes very little to win Mother Bunch's heart,—you have only to say you are unhappy, and her love goes out to you at once.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Story tells itself.

CHRISTMAS ROSES IN PLACE OF FORGET-ME-NOTS.

VERA was the only member of Grandfather Sylvester's family who took no part in the discussion about Ikkey, their hopes and disappointments. She never mentioned him. If in her daily walks her grave eyes searched the King's Road, beach, and streets, she said nothing. She came and went much the same as at Cool-Dillay, only she was not allowed out alone; but Frederick, who had little to do, was told off, to his great delight, to accompany her upon her expeditions.

December rushed in, dispelling the mild, balmy

November. No longer any boating; no rain as yet, but clouds hurrying madly to and fro; white horses riding the waves; the sea rushing in with a steady, threatening *swish, swish*, upon the shingle, as if it held its power in reserve and was explaining that something much worse might be looked for in the future.

It was difficult to get Vera from the sea, which had a wonderful fascination for her: she never tired of it. One afternoon she had intended to go to Rottingdean, escorted by the faithful Frederick, when at the last moment they had an errand to do for Grandfather Sylvester quite in a different direction, and Rottingdean was postponed until another day.

They returned down West Street. Frederick knew Miss Vera's ways well, and was quite sure she would not pass S. Paul's without entering, so as a matter of course, the two turned into the long corridor; Frederick pushed open the heavy door, and they walked in.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and was dark inside; Vera took a few steps up the centre aisle, and then stopped. In a corner of the seat near to her knelt a man, his face half concealed by his hands. Vera waited for a second to be *quite* sure, then stepped lightly to him, and putting one arm across his shoulders as he knelt, she whispered distinctly in her soft, slow voice,

"Ikkey, the ring is found."

Ikkey withdrew his hands and started: the colour flew into his face, his lips quivered, his brown eyes filled with tears, he would have shouted aloud in the very joy of his heart, if the sight of Vera's grave, tranquil face had not brought to his memory the place in which he was. She was as quiet and composed as if it was only yesterday they had parted, and she was telling him "it was a stormy day."

"GOD bless you, Miss Vera," he said huskily.

Vera smiled, and knelt down by his side, and together they said their prayers—both, no doubt,

thanksgivings. Alas, and alas, how little Nature is one with us. She is sad ofttimes when we are happy, and when our hearts are breaking she is laughing merrily, as if in scorn. It was in a church Ikkey had last seen Vera when the sun in the west had thrown the colours of the windows upon the pavement, staining it richly with amber, purple, gold and red: when the birds sang their sweetest; when the trees rustled softly and the jasmine scented the air. But then he was wretched, miserable; for a stain rested upon his character, and, until the cloud lifted, he would not return to those he loved. It was in a church he next saw Vera, and no sunshine melted the colours in the windows, no birds sang, no flowers gave out their sweetness. There was the gathering of the evening shadows and the wind swept round the building slowly, thoughtfully, as if it was meditating getting up its strength for a storm, and was sighing to itself, and half-repenting of the mischief it would do ere the night was over. Only Vera was

alike in the two scenes; she had shown him the means of comfort in the first, and in the second she had brought him the good news which had filled his heart with joy and thankfulness. Now he could return to Cool-Dillay with his character cleared in the minds of those who had doubted.

The boys and Nancy were out, only Grandfather Sylvester and Humfray's mother were keeping blind-man's holiday by the side of a comfortable fire, when the door was gently opened, and Vera's soft voice said,

"Grandfather Sylvester, Ikkey has come."

Grandfather Sylvester was leaning back in his arm-chair, but he straightened himself, and was broad awake the moment the name, which was a worry and nightmare to him, fell upon his ear: for the reason he was backward in recovering his strength was the trouble he was in about Ikkey. He was a just and good man, and it vexed him sorely that, through the carelessness of any member of his family, suspicion should fall upon the innocent.

Ikkey received a glad welcome from those at home first; from the others when they came in. He had also a small scolding for having run away and not stood to his colours as was the duty of a brave soldier. They discovered that it was he to whom Dann had spoken, but upon his way back to his lodgings that evening, he overheard that a gardener at Cliftonville wanted temporary assistance. He obtained the place, and his time there had ended the day he was found. He privately informed "Miss Vera" that he always went into a church now if he found it open, to say his prayers, and it was upon his return from Cliftonville that he went into S. Paul's and Vera found him. It was just her usual luck, the boys said. Ikkey had no idea the family from the House were at Brighton. He had not written, because he had had no regular work; only lived from hand to mouth, sometimes not getting coppers enough to pay for a night's lodging. If he had told Annie this she would have sent him money,

and *that* he would not have taken. He had intended, now he had money to pay his fare, to make his way back to London the day after his work was ended at Cliftonville, try his fortune there again, and if he succeeded, write to Annie then.

Grandfather Sylvester grew more himself now that this burden was removed from him. As the air seemed to suit him some of them stayed on at Brighton for a while longer ; Bill and Nancy however were sent back with Ikkey, and the others followed in time for Christmas.

Among its festivities came the marriage of Annie and Ikkey, Vera of course being chief bridesmaid. It was upon the festival of Vera's kind old Saint John ; and his smile, to her fancy, seemed brighter and more loving that day as, in his blue gown from his place in the window, he was among the wedding party and held his share—a silent one—in the services. The only flowers Vera could find to strew before the bride and bridegroom were Christmas

roses, which bloomed in quantities round the House and which were particularly large and snowy white, unsoiled by contact with the mould. Her basket was piled high with them, for she had gathered all she could find. She had tea with the young couple in the afternoon, by their express wish. They were to live in Sykes's cottage, the furniture of which had been the wedding present of the people old and young at the House.

In the happiness of the present, Vera did not forget the past. Annie and Ikkey filled Daddy Sykes's rooms at the cottage, but they could not push him from his place in her heart. She thought of him always when she was there, until she almost fancied she saw him in his garden, bent double with rheumatism, but ready to give her a friendly greeting as he held out to her, over the gate, his daily posy of flowers.

Mr. Pippo spared a few days for them at Christmas, but was a great worry to them. He was very unnaturally thin, and his face seemed "all eyes."

Humfray and Ethelred said he could be seen through ; Gay said he would be like Augustus in the nursery story, who refused his bread-and-milk and grew daily thinner, until at last he vanished altogether. He was working *very* hard at his picture, and feverishly anxious about its getting into the Royal Academy. Grandfather Sylvester looked grave over it, and said Mr. Pippo had set his heart so much upon the matter that he was afraid, if it failed, the shock in his delicate health would almost, if not quite, kill him.

It was as Humfray said, the world was full of trouble. Ikkey absent, and perhaps starving, was no sooner off their minds than there was Mr. Pippo weighing heavily upon them. Ted Congreive said he did what he could, but there was little to be done, as Pippo Stevens was too proud to accept help. He had nothing to live upon, except what he earned, and he devoted so much attention to perfecting the important picture that he really left himself not enough time in which to earn money

to procure for himself the necessaries of life. If the picture did succeed he was going to take Vera as a model for a sacred subject; but his lips quivered and his thin, shapely brown hands moved restlessly as he said,

"*If* I succeed."

CHAPTER XIV.

Humfray tells the Story.

WHO STOLE THE CAKE?

WE have had a great piece of good news: it is this: *our* picture has been accepted at the Royal Academy.

We always thought Mr. Pippo would succeed, he is such a clever artist, but he was very nervous and uncertain himself about it, and although you may be *almost* sure in your own mind, there is nothing like being *quite* certain; and that is just what we are now. Mr. Pippo sent us a telegram directly he knew himself. There were only four words, but they were enough, for they said, "I have been successful."

And all the world will look upon our picture. Grandfather Sylvester rather damped our joy by saying that Mr. Pippo would be almost as anxious as ever, until he knew what the critics said about it. Phyllis said, what a pity there were such things as critics, and Grandfather Sylvester said they were necessary and useful—sometimes.

Last year what with Grandfather's illness, Ikkey and Mr. Pippo starving, the loss of the ring, Sylvia's disgrace, and the eating of that unfortunate sheep,—we have hated mutton ever since,—we seem to have had nothing but trouble. This year is beginning beautifully. Not only is our picture hung upon the walls of the Academy, but we are to go and see it.

Mr. Pippo begged so hard that Grandfather Sylvester had not the heart to refuse, and at last consented to take us. We were so delighted, and thanked him over and over again for his kindness. We are all to go except Vera and Gordon, even Bill and Nan. They were not intended to go at first,

they are always such a responsibility. When they heard this they sat upon two chairs and cried, and pointed out amid their sobs that it was *Pat's* likeness,—they quite forgot Vera by-the-bye. Grandfather Sylvester, who is most kind, relented, upon condition that they gave him their word of honour that they would behave properly. They promised eagerly, but the worst of them is they will promise *anything* and immediately forget. Grandfather Sylvester privately asked Ethelred and myself if we would devote ourselves to them that day and not let them out of our sight. We said that we would, and we mean to keep our word, for we do not want him to be worried. He did not think at first that he should be able to go; since his illness he has not been so strong, and the fatigue would have been too much for him if he had not combined business with pleasure and managed it that way. He is going up to London the day before about the publishing of his book, and will sleep there, thus having only the one journey each day.

We have tickets for the artists' day, the last day of April, and when people in general are not admitted. This in itself is delightful, for we shall see the artists themselves and other celebrated characters, and it is nice to feel you are where everybody cannot be. Grandfather Sylvester says this is a "mean idea," but, all the same, we think it.

The eventful day has passed, and we had a beautiful time. To begin at the beginning, which of course is Bill and Nan. We dreaded them. Ethelred's first words when he was dressing were,

"We have got to take those youngsters in tow to-day."

They were a great trouble, even in the train. When they travelled to Brighton they were subdued by Grandfather Sylvester's illness and by his presence, and were obliged to keep tolerably quiet. On the journey up to town they were in the wildest spirits, and Ethelred said they reminded him of nothing so much as a couple of ginger-

beer corks. When Cousin Constance spoke to them they sat quiet for a short time, then there was a sudden plunge, and before you could look round they were hanging half out of the window.

When we reached Victoria, Ethelred took hold of Bill as firmly as if he had been a policeman leading him off to the police-station, and I tucked Nancy's arm in mine. When they saw anything particular they made a dash, but we were taller and stronger, and did not relax our hold upon them until we arrived at the Academy, where Mr. Pippo and Grandfather were already waiting for us. The former was very nervous, for I noticed how white his lips were, and his hand was trembling when he shook hands with us. He did not ask us if we had had a pleasant journey, but only said,

"It is hung in a very good place."

"You must take us to it at once," said mother.

The rooms were quite full, and if Grandfather

Sylvester looked much about him I am sure he must have altered his opinion that people of genius are just like everybody else. He explained afterwards that he meant themselves and not their outside appearance, but even then I am sure he is mistaken, and I told him so, for how could they do great things if they were ordinary? He laughed and said he must retract, or rather that I misunderstood him, for they were like other people so far as their manners and the "society" part of them were concerned.

We could only follow Mr. Pippo one at a time, twisting in and out to avoid treading upon toes and trains. Bill and Nan got into trouble several times, for I heard two or three ladies cry "Oh," gathering up their trains and glancing crossly over their shoulder.

At last we stood in front of our picture, and even if Mr. Pippo had not painted it and it had not been our picture, we should have all agreed it was out and out the best thing there. It was so

much better than we had expected even, for our memories of it were when it was in a most unfinished state.

Vera was just herself, with her grave, pale, sweet face, and what Grandfather Sylvester calls her "great starry eyes," and Pat's colouring was true to life. Vera, dressed in cream cashmere with a gold-coloured sash, is holding up the two fingers of her right hand as a rebuke to Pat, the left rests upon the ground, and she is leaning a little upon it, which pushes her shoulder above her dress. The background is formed by the window in Grandfather Sylvester's study, which is almost concealed by long, heavy curtains, falling in straight folds from the top of the window to the floor. Mr. Pippo has painted the curtains a dull olive green, in reality they are crimson,—the ones in the study I mean.

When we had admired to our heart's content, we crowded round Mr. Pippo to congratulate him. He is very dark, and while we were talking to him

I noticed the dusky red colour, which always comes when he is nervous or excited, creep into his cheeks, and his hands moved restlessly. I turned round, following the direction of his eyes; two gentlemen, their backs towards us, were standing before our picture, and Mr. Pippo whispered with a catch in his breath,

"The President of the Royal Academy."

I do not know whether it was mean to listen; I should think that remarks made in a public place are public property. Whether it was mean or not we did listen, even Grandfather Sylvester did not move out of ear-shot, and we all stayed, holding our breath, not to miss a word.

"It is well painted," said one gentleman.

"Very well," said the other, the President, as Mr. Pippo had whispered to us. "The colouring is harmonious: the brilliant red colour of the dog contrasts well with the fairness of the child and the subdued tones of her dress; the whole set off by the heavy curtains of sombre green for a

background. The expression of the child's face is very good; the grave rebuke in eyes and attitude difficult to catch in one so young."

"The colouring of the dog has a defect: it is splendid, but not *nature*. There never lived any dog of such a brilliant shade of colour."

If it had not been for the good results which followed, I should really be ashamed to write what happened next. Bill and Nan were listening eagerly with open mouths, when suddenly they made a dart at the gentlemen and hung upon their coats.

"Indeed, sir," said Nan in a loud voice, "he is exactly the real true colour. Mr. Pippo has painted him beautifully. He cut off a curl of his hair to match it with his paints."

"He is our very own dog," said Bill, in an aggrieved voice, "so we *ought* to know."

"But if you think we are not speaking the truth, we could bring him up to London that you might see for yourselves," said Nan.

It happened in such a short time, and before we

had recovered ourselves, Grandfather Sylvester was making his apologies for Bill and Nan. The President saw he was vexed, and begged he would not dream of apologizing, as he was sure his friend would be very glad to be set right. The gentleman then came forward and said he was a great lover of animals, and when he had said he thought the colouring unreal he was speaking from experience, as, though he had seen many Irish setters, he never remembered one of such a brilliant hue, and that the dog in question must be a very handsome fellow. Then the President asked if the child was a portrait.

Grandfather Sylvester said, "Yes, it is a very good likeness."

During this time Mr. Pippo had been standing almost hidden by Grandfather Sylvester, who is so very tall. He had been growing more and more nervous, first the red coming into his cheeks, then so pale, that we thought he must be ill. Grandfather Sylvester turned and said,

"The artist who painted the picture can tell you more than I. Mr. Pippo Stevens."

Mr. Pippo pulled himself together and bowed, the President said something nice to him about our picture, and then bowed to all of us and passed on. I think he would have stayed longer talking, but quite a crowd had collected, and we were blocking up the road.

The tears were in Mr. Pippo's eyes as we went on our way. It is so sad and pathetic to see a man cry. It does not matter so much for girls and women, because it is more natural to them somehow, but with a man it is different. The whole of that day he was in a sort of dream, but I am sure he was very happy. We wanted to take him back with us, but he said he must not give himself a holiday yet; when he could leave conscientiously, then he would run down to us if we would have him. He sent to Vera his very best love and a large paper parcel. We gave it to her the next day; it was a splendid edition, beautifully illus-

trated and bound, of Hans Andersen's fairy stories.

We were very quiet upon our journey home, for Grandfather Sylvester was tired and we wanted him to have a nap. Even Bill and Nan did nothing worse than *kick*, and as they were sitting opposite to each other they did not inconvenience any one else with restless feet. Cousin Constance is going to make them sit quite still for a certain time every day, after the example of a great man whose mother made him do the same. We hope it will improve them, but we think Cousin Constance ought to have begun earlier.

CHAPTER XV.

Humfray ends the Story.

MR. PIPPO'S FORTUNE.

WE had been home a few days, when a letter came from Mr. Pippo, and, by the same post, one from the President inviting Grandfather Sylvester, mother, Vera, Bill, Nancy, and Pat, to have luncheon with him at his own house. He was anxious, he said, to make the acquaintance of the two who sat for their portraits in Mr. Pippo Stevens' picture.

Mr. Pippo's letter was written in an excited state, we could tell, for a number of words were scratched out, and there were several blots.

The President had really liked our picture so much that he had bought it, asking Mr. Pippo if he would mind if he altered the name, which was the only thing of which he did not quite approve. So instead of being called, "Who stole the cake?" it is to be for the future, "A grave rebuke." We prefer the President's choice.

Oh! how we all wished we were in Bill and Nancy's shoes; and as for them, they were so extremely uppish over it, that it required the combined weight of the whole family to flatten them, but even then we did not succeed. They flirted about, their heads in the air, more than ever resembling a pair of canaries. We could only, up to the last minute, beg, and implore, and entreat them to behave themselves as well as it was in their power to do, and not to bring disgrace upon us.

Grandfather Sylvester did not feel strong enough for the fatigue of another long day in town. It takes us an hour and a half by train each way,

and he was very tired after his other outing, even though he had slept in London, and had only the journey back. So mother alone took Vera, Pat, Bill and Nan, and told us about it when she came home.

It was a very hot day, and Pat went with them in the same carriage. He had never travelled by train before, and was in a state of the greatest excitement. It was all so new to him, and he could not understand it. He put his two big paws upon the window-ledge, poked his red head out as far as it would go, and made every one uncomfortable, for they thought he might make a spring, and that would have been terrible,—I am afraid he must have been killed. No coaxing, or entreaties would prevail upon him to lie still. When he was not looking out of the window, he was walking up and down, waving his bushy tail, and wanting to be petted.

During the first part of the journey they had the carriage to themselves, but afterwards there

was a scarcity of room, and mother grew anxious. Ladies drew back when they saw his red head at the window, his mouth wide open showing his beautiful teeth, and his long tongue hanging out, for he was panting with the heat.

One lady said,

"I will not travel with that fierce animal,—he is sure to bite."

Bill and Nan were indignant. Bill said,

"Fancy calling our dear Pat *fierce*."

"He has much kinder eyes than the lady's," said Nan.

"People are so silly," said Bill.

At the next station several others passed along, looking for seats, and one said,

"Oh, do not get into the carriage with *that* creature!"

And another,

"Dear me, that dog will go mad,—see how he is panting. I shall avoid that carriage."

And a third said,

"Guard, dogs have no business in carriages,—there is a dog-box on purpose for them. I shall complain."

Bill and Nan grew more indignant, mother more uncomfortable.

Fortunately two gentlemen got in who did not seem to mind Pat. They remarked upon his beauty, patted him on the head, and Pat made friends with them at once, for he is a very sociable animal.

Mother said, "You really must *make* Pat lie down," and Bill and Nan coaxed, and begged, and entreated, and said, "Dear Pat, *do* lie down," but Pat only walked to and fro, and wagged his tail harder,—they have no more control over him than they have over our Alderney cow.

The two gentlemen came to their assistance, and tried to squeeze Pat into a lying position by pressing their hands upon his back. They succeeded after a while, but at every station where the train stopped he was up again, his paws upon

the window-ledge, his red, good-tempered face peering at everything that was going on. Then all the coaxing had to begin again, and mother said she felt quite sorry for the gentlemen.

They were exceedingly kind, for at a station where there were refreshment-rooms, one of them got out and fetched Pat not only water, but three sponge cakes. He enjoyed both cakes and water, —indeed the latter was necessary, for he was hot and thirsty.

In return for their kindness, mother told the gentlemen Pat's story,—that he had been painted in a picture in the Royal Academy, that the President had bought it, and now he was on his way, by special invitation, to luncheon at the President's house.

They delighted Bill and Nan, who of course said, "He's our dog," by saying that they looked upon Pat with immense respect, after hearing that, and would much like to be in his place.

We have never tired of hearing of the beautiful

things they saw that day. They ate their luncheon at a dining-table where the centre was a miniature piece of water, with grasses and ferns around it. How cool and refreshing it must look upon a hot day,—one would enjoy one's luncheon then, instead of feeling, as we sometimes do if the weather is very hot, that we wish such a meal had never been invented. Every room in the house was filled with beautiful things, it seems as if we never came to an end of them, for they are always breaking out even now with,—"Oh, I forgot to tell you about so-and-so," and then we hear of something else most wonderful. It must have been "like fairy land," as Phyllis and Sylvia say.

The President was much amused, mother said, at the indignant account Bill and Nan gave of Pat and his journey. He soothed their feelings, and delighted them by saying that people must have imagined the fierceness, for Pat's expression was most genial and pleasant.

The colour in the picture was not overdone,—

indeed, upon comparing Pat with his likeness, the President thought he might have been painted even brighter, though that was scarcely possible, mother said.

The President was charmed with Vera,—she was quite at her ease with him, as she is with everybody, and he called her "a quaintly grave maiden." He took her hand, and showed her all over the house, pointing out anything he wanted her particularly to notice, and then waiting to hear if she had a remark to make about it. Once they came upon a lovely statuette of "Peace," who was represented as an angel with folded wings. The President said to Vera,

"Do you know who that is, my child?"

And she said at once, "One of the beautiful Angels GOD sends to take care of us."

And the President did not speak for a minute, then he only answered, "Yes."

If Isabel can spare her, she is to go and stay a whole week with him some day, all by herself.

Think, how nice for her! We have a different feeling about Vera to that we have about Bill and Nan. We have no fear for her, we know that wherever she is she will do us credit. We wish we could say the same of the twins.

Mother said that Mr. Pippo was an altered being; he was radiant with happiness, and, in the cab on his way to the station, he cried for joy, and assured mother again and again that it was all owing to us that he had succeeded. He was so depressed at his past failures, and did not know what subject to choose until he saw Vera; and then our sympathy urged him to persevere, and determined him not to be daunted, but to try his hardest.

Mother assured him that we had little to do with it, that he had within him the true artist spirit which must have shown itself under any difficulties. But he shook his head, and said,

"You do not know what loneliness is, nor what miracles sympathy can work."

Then mother said, she felt how he must have suffered.

He took Vera in his arms at the station, to put her into the carriage, and, as he kissed her, he said,

"It is you who have made my fortune, Vera."

But Bill and Nan were up from their seats in a minute,

"No, no, no," they said, "it is *Pat* who has made your fortune."

Then Vera said,

"Is your fortune good, Mr. Pippo?"

Mr. Pippo answered,

"Yes, I hope so,—*very* good, thanks to you, little Vera."

Then she said in her grave, sedate manner,

"We are all glad, and GOD, and the angels too."

Pat was thoroughly tired, and slept all the way home, to mother's great relief. Bill and Nan were far from sleep, and talked both together, when they saw us, until it was difficult to distinguish what was said. We made out a good

deal, though they paid no attention to our request that they should speak in turns.

Vera, like Pat, was tired, and did not speak much. Grandfather Sylvester took her in his arms while the noise was at its height, and said,

"Well, Mother Bunch, Bill and Nancy say it is Pat who has made Mr. Pippo's fortune, and Mr. Pippo says it is *you*. What do you think about the matter? Who is it?"

We all stopped talking, and waited for the answer.

Vera could hardly keep her eyes open. She put her two arms round Grandfather Sylvester's neck and "loved" him sleepily; then she rested her head upon his shoulder, and said in her pretty, slow voice,

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